

Taking Action for First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes

DISCUSSION PAPER



June 21, 2010

First Nations Post-Secondary Education:
Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Panel

**TAKING ACTION FOR FIRST NATIONS POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION: ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY, AND OUTCOMES
DISCUSSION PAPER**

Assembly of First Nations

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The First Nations Post-Secondary
Education: Access, Opportunity
and Outcomes Panel

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Taking Action for First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Discussion Paper

PREFACE

The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Panel is composed of ten individuals who are very familiar with the Post-Secondary Education Program. Each member has over 20-30 years experience in post-secondary and higher education. The panel is co-chaired by Dr. Rose-Alma J. McDonald and Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux. The Panel includes perspectives from First Nations educators and administrators across Canada including Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia,

This paper is intended to inform and advance a policy dialogue on First Nations post-secondary education by the AFN Chiefs' Committee on Education, the AFN General Assembly and ultimately the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada who has committed to review the existing Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

This document clearly articulates the need for supporting post-secondary education and skills training for First Nations youth and adults, not only for them to meet their individual academic aspirations, but also that they may contribute to the capacity and nation building required to facilitate strong First Nations governance.

We have seen numerous successes through the implementation of First Nations control over education despite nearly two decades of fiscal restraint and the challenges resulting from the devastating legacy of the residential school era.

Canada must honour its commitment to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to secure a fiscal framework for sustainable funding for First Nations education. Statutory funding arrangements are required that are based on real costs that address the long term training and institutional support requirements of First Nations.

Investing in First Nations is not only a benefit to First Nations communities; it is a long-term and sustainable stimulus plan for Canada's economy. We are calling on the federal government to work hand-in-hand with First Nations to ensure equitable funding and support for post-secondary education and lifelong learning. We are further asking all higher learning institutions in Canada to recognize, support and contribute to improved First Nation education outcomes as partners and contributors to student success.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following paper highlights the history of Post-Secondary Education program funding in Canada and the long standing resistance by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to provide the resources necessary to ensure that First Nation students can access and complete the higher education they are entitled to as affirmed by the spirit and intent of Treaties signed in exchange for the sharing of our territories and lands.

We have included the AFN Declaration on First Nations Jurisdiction over Education to remind the Government of Canada that First Nations leaders have no doubt about their obligation and responsibility to the well-being and health of their community members. They are fully united in their assertion of the right to provide access to a path of lifelong learning for their young people and adult learners. First Nations have always adhered to a clear vision of an inclusive and holistic education, and will not allow Canada to disregard their obligation to provide adequate resources in fulfillment of their historic and contemporary fiduciary commitments.

Treaties and agreements stemming from the 19th and 20th centuries inform the provision of a formal education, fully competitive in today's social and economic markets, as an entitlement flowing from political relationships and legislation. First Nations have consistently confirmed their right to control education as clearly stated in the foundational 1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy statement.

There has been an incredible amount of documentation produced around the issue of First Nations education, and post-secondary education, with as many as 6,000 reports tabled up to 2002 and another several thousand in the past eight years (Mayes, 2007). The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Panel strongly assert that a strategy is required to facilitate the efforts of First Nations leaders, educators, and program support staff to preserve and protect the PSE Program and ensure that essential dollars are made available to First Nation learners and Indigenous institutions of higher learning.

The seven steps: Accessibility, Accountability, Data Collection and Reporting, Recognizing and Ensuring Student Success, Program Effectiveness, Support for First Nations Institutions and the Leveraging of Other Resources, speak to the key elements of what First Nations have been doing to support PSE students and where they can support each other in their response to the Government of Canada's plan to reconfigure the PSE program funding and remove it from the control and administration of First Nations.

We know that the *Cost of Doing Nothing*, and the need to *Take Action* hinge on providing solid *Recommendations* and viable *Options* to our leaders so they can clearly demonstrate that First Nations have not only been successful administrators of the PSE program, they are essential to creating community-based PSE solutions.

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A FIRST NATIONS VISION

First Nations view education as a process of nurturing learners in linguistically and culturally-appropriate, holistic learning environments that meet individual and collective needs, thereby ensuring that all First Nations people achieve their personal and collective visions within lifelong comprehensive learning systems.

FIRST NATIONS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STATEMENT

Provisions for, and access to, lifelong learning is an inherent and treaty right of all First Nations peoples. First Nations assert their right and responsibility to direct and make decisions regarding all matters related to First Nations learning.

First Nations understand that learning is a formal and informal, instinctive, and experiential lifelong journey, encompassing early childhood, elementary and secondary education, vocational training, as well as, post-secondary and adult learning. This lifelong journey must be built upon experiences that embrace both Indigenous and mainstream knowledge systems.

First Nations ancestral languages, cultures, and histories shall be at the core of First Nations learning. It is vital for First Nations to deliver culturally-appropriate and relevant programs, as learning is an established vehicle for the transmission of culture, language, knowledge and traditions to our future generations. The inclusion of First Nations values is imperative for the creation of quality, holistic learning environments.

The primary role of holistic balanced learning systems is to transmit First Nations ancestral languages, traditions, cultures and histories, while at the same time preparing and making accessible to the learner the support and tools that will allow them to achieve their full individual potential in any setting they choose.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This paper is about ensuring continuing First Nation student success through post-secondary education and guaranteeing equitability in access to programs, services and institutional supports as guaranteed by the 1982 Canadian Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

According to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) Post-Secondary Education (PSE) National Program Guidelines “the objective of the Post-Secondary Education Program is to improve the employability of First Nations people by providing eligible students with access to education and skills development opportunities at the post-secondary level.”

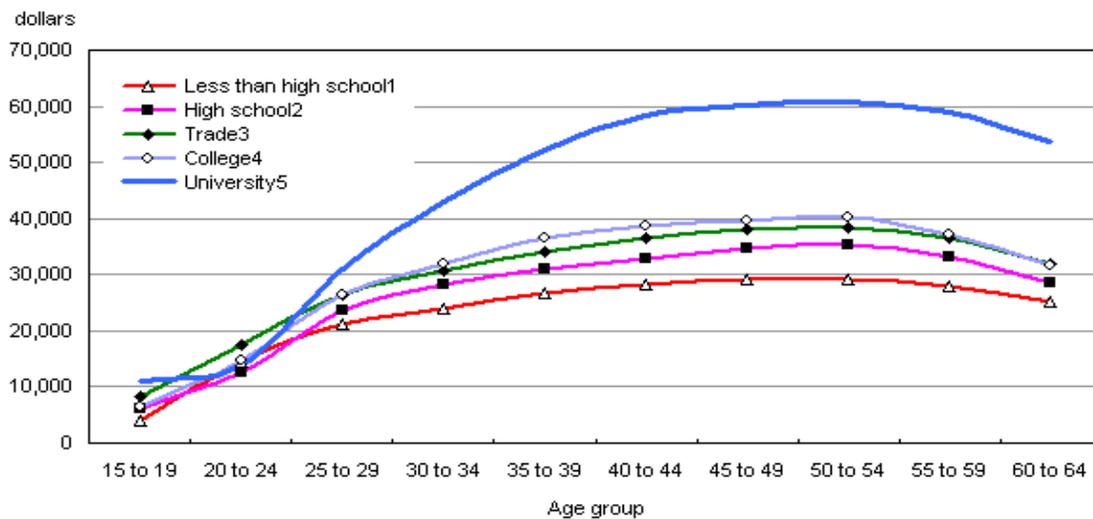
The Post-Secondary Education program has three main components which consist of the PSSSP (post-secondary student support program) designed “to provide eligible students

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with access to education and skills development opportunities at the post-secondary level;” the University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) program which “provides financial support to students to enable them to attain the academic level required for entrance to degree and diploma credit programs;” and the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) “which supports the development and delivery of college and university level courses for First Nation students and research and development.”

Although post-secondary education funding is grossly inadequate First Nations have consistently demonstrated measurable, albeit unacknowledged, success in graduation and employment statistics. Since First Nations took direct control of the administration and monitoring of post-secondary education funding the number of graduating students has increased from approximately 3,600 in 1977-78 to 27,500 in 1999-2000.

Average Employment Income by Age Group and Education



As a result of the 2% cap on PSE funding in 1996-97, the number of First Nations PSE students decreased by 20% with attendance falling from 27,500 in 1999-2000 to 22,000 in 2008-2009. A total of 10,589 students were denied access to PSE in the years 2001-2006.¹ These numbers clearly demonstrate that the goals and objectives of the PSE program have been seriously compromised by a lack of federal foresight and inadequate investment in First Nation education. In 2007-08, an additional 2,858 students were denied access to PSE funding due to the 2% cap, with more being denied for every subsequent year the cap is implemented.¹

First Nations poverty will cost Canada up to \$11 billion per year by 2016 (RCAP 1996). First Nations poverty costs Canada close to twice as much as services and programs reaching First Nations communities. Loss of productivity, government revenues, and the costs of social assistance and programs will continue to add up, as well as, the human cost associated with poverty and despair.²

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To educate a mother will educate a family. First Nations people tend to have less formal education than other Canadians by a significant margin. We know that poverty is not necessarily a predictor of long term success or wage earning ability. Instead we know that the education of the parents of a First Nations child, especially the mother, is a better indicator of whether a child will go on to higher education.

More than half of First Nations peoples across Canada are under 23 years of age, and this population is growing at a much faster rate than Canada as a whole. First Nations governments cannot keep up with the demands of their growing population without an investment in their future development through early childhood, youth and adult education and training.

Further, the level of education of a First Nations person is a strong predictor of long term estimated lifetime earnings. A First Nations man with no diploma is likely to earn about \$546,000 in a lifetime compared to a Non-First Nations man who could earn about \$1,099,000. Comparatively a First Nations man with a university degree has the potential of earning \$1,453,000 in a lifetime compared to a non-First Nations man with an earning potential of \$2,227,000.

Clearly education is a long-term predictor of lifetime success, earning potential and the ability of First Nations people to be significant contributors to their families, communities and society as a whole. It is our vision that post-secondary education be supported, fully financed, and protected by a statutory mandate by the federal government to guarantee the capacity building, self-governing and nation building that is required to build strong First Nations within Canada and the global community.

It is the purpose of this paper to assert First Nations Treaty and Constitutional Rights to a comprehensive education in this country. It is imperative that the Crown and INAC not deny the necessary human and fiscal resources required to close the educational and socio-cultural gaps that continue to plague First Nations. This is a significant component of the fiduciary obligation that Canada accepted when it signed treaties on a “*Nation to Nation*” basis, thereby, giving Canada the use and benefit of lands and resources, and a guarantee to First Nations of an equitable standard of living, particularly through education, in perpetuity.



A DECLARATION ON FIRST NATIONS JURISDICTION OVER EDUCATION

We affirm that we are the Indigenous peoples of this land.

We affirm that we have always had jurisdiction over First Nations learning and we maintain the right and responsibility to establish First Nations learning institutions and to provide learning in First Nations languages.

We affirm that based on the spirit and intent of our “*Nation to Nation*” relationships with the Crown we have collective inherent and treaty rights to education.

Therefore ...

- First Nations reaffirm and declare that we are the original peoples of this land.
- We have the right and the responsibility to govern ourselves in a manner that is consistent with the responsibilities given to us by our ancestors and the Creator.
- We affirm that First Nations have never given up our inalienable inherent right to be responsible for the learning of our people.
- We affirm our right to exercise full jurisdiction over First Nations learning.
- We affirm that the federal government continues to have a fiduciary obligation to ensure that First Nations can implement our inherent right to exercise jurisdiction over lifelong learning.
- We object to any imposition of provincial and territorial governmental authority over First Nations learning institutions.
- We affirm that, as First Nations citizens, we are individually and collectively responsible for ensuring that each child has the opportunity to learn and practice his or her First Nations language and culture, and to learn what is needed to live a full and complete life that respects First Nations personal and collective visions. We will continue to view our responsibilities seriously, as this is a critical part of our ancestral traditions that must be maintained.
- Building upon the inspiration of the visionary leaders of the 1970’s, and with the guidance of today’s respected First Nations Elders and leaders, we affirm our commitment to cultivate and implement a renewed lifelong learning vision. We will continue to assert First Nations jurisdiction, maintain First Nations responsibility for the learning of our people, and work to fully implement First Nations visions of education.

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- We affirm that we have the right to establish and maintain our own comprehensive learning systems and to develop partnerships that will create stability and ensure the fundamental survival of First Nations within a contemporary context.
- We call upon the Government of Canada to maintain the honour of the crown and the spirit and intent of the treaties by affirming First Nations rights and responsibilities to govern and to be fully accountable to First Nations peoples by investing in and supporting their lifelong learning.
- Furthermore, we call upon the Government of Canada to honour First Nation rights to sustainable human and capital resources that will allow First Nations to implement comprehensive First Nation lifelong learning systems that will bring about positive results for all Aboriginal learners and for Canadian society as a whole.

EDUCATION IS AN INHERENT, TREATY AND HUMAN RIGHT

First Nations treaties provide the historical and legal foundation for the creation of the Canadian state. Many of the earliest friendship treaties affirmed a comparable standard of life between the treaty signatories. Treaties from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries explicitly identify the provision of education as a treaty entitlement and confirm First Nations jurisdiction.

Treaty and inherent rights are recognized and affirmed in S.35 of the 1982 Constitution of Canada. In addition, the right to education is a universal right as stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 13 and 14 which calls upon states as follows:

Article 13

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that Indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

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2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

There were over 2.5 million First Nations people prior to colonization. Now there are about 800,000 according to census figures. By 2020 the number of seniors will double in mainstream Canadian society. In contrast for First Nations over 50% of the population will be less than 25 years old by the year 2020. This has significant ramifications on PSE programming, planning and financing.

Further, the impacts of Bill C-31 in 1985 had a tremendous impact on the dollars allocated under the PSE program. It immediately reduced the numbers of students able to be funded for post-secondary education. Bill C-3, introduced as a result of the McIvor decision in the British Columbia Court of Appeal in 2010 will add 45,000 new First Nation enrolments that also has tremendous potential to impact PSE now and in the immediate future.

RESPONSIBILITIES

First Nations have unique responsibilities as the original peoples and Nations in Canada. First Nations have an understanding of natural laws, values and worldviews that are focused on maintaining a peaceful balance with all of creation.

The Government of Canada has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that each First Nations community's learning goals are attained. This responsibility includes ensuring all necessary resources are available to First Nations to implement comprehensive First Nations education systems. These include human and financial resources that are required to support individual learners in a variety of academic settings.

The Government of Canada has a fiduciary responsibility and obligation to support First Nations in a transparent manner to ensure that all gaps in regard to First Nations learning are addressed immediately. Doing so will maximize the use of human and financial resources that meet the immediate and future needs identified by First Nations for all levels of learning.

Each First Nation person has a unique role in lifelong learning within their community.

- The learner's role is to identify personal goals and live in a respectful manner based on nurturing individual gifts and talents.
- Elders have a mentoring, stabilizing, teaching and guidance role.

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- Educators are responsible for acting as positive role models and for transmitting culturally appropriate and relevant emerging knowledge.
- All are responsible for ensuring that the spiritual, cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of each learner are met.

FIRST NATIONS LIFELONG LEARNING

First Nations vision of lifelong learning encompasses learning from the pre-natal to Elder level and includes systems that are holistic, high quality, linguistic and culturally-based.

All First Nations learners require a wide variety of opportunities and learning systems that will nurture their learning and allow them to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to actively and positively participate in, and contribute to, their families, communities, Nations, society and the global community.

First Nations envision learning systems that include comprehensive First Nation-developed curricula and programs for pre-school, Head Start, K-12, adult literacy and upgrading, career, vocational and technical training, college and university, community and continuing learning, and other types of learning as determined by each Nation.

First Nations comprehensive learning systems, including First, Second and Third level services under First Nation jurisdiction (First Nations controlled with adequate, long term, sustainable funding), must include programs and human resource services that respond to current and future needs and improved learner outcomes.

In order to measure outcomes, First Nations developed and controlled comprehensive data, management and evaluation systems are critical in order to ensure opportunities for continuous improvement. First Nation governments and organizations have dedicated enormous efforts toward the development of principles of performance measures, information systems and data management to ensure that First Nation students continue to experience the support and encouragement towards success that is required.

“We should not be standing hat in hand, begging to send our children to an institution. We should be awaiting well-prepared proposals submitted from colleges and universities describing what they can do for our students. We have the power to negotiate with any entity to ensure the proper benefits for our tribal members – and we should be doing that regularly.” (Vine Deloria Jr. *Accountability and Sovereignty in American Indian Education*)

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MAXIMIZING POST SECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING

First Nations require adequate resources to accomplish the vision of First Nations lifelong learning that is a comprehensive system under First Nation jurisdiction that addresses intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical needs through quality lifelong learning that is grounded in First Nations' languages, cultures, traditions, values and worldviews. This requires the confirmation and mobilization of seven strategic actions which encompass the entire spectrum of higher education (adult education, vocational education/advanced skills, graduate school, Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning, etc.). The continuing success of First Nations post-secondary education requires the commitment and statutory endorsement of the following mutually supported action steps:

1) **ACCESSIBILITY** which incorporates the national promotion and implementation of:

- Unified protection of PSE funds that appropriately address all levels of higher education.
- Flexibility of funding models that are First Nation, district, regional and territorial based.
- National principles that ensure equitable re-distribution of community based education funds (when possible) to ensure equitable access to all First Nation youth and adults.
- National student eligibility criteria with specifics that are First Nation based.
- Fully funded support services that include local, district, regional and territorial based education coordinators and counsellors.
- Technology training and access to high speed internet.
- Learning institutions that guarantee access to community based program delivery and support services.
- Satellite schools and alternative delivery models.
- Adequate and consistent resources reflective of rising/future costs.
- Funding of financial, technical and human resources.

2) **ACCOUNTABILITY** (government and First Nations at multiple levels) which includes the promotion and implementation of:

- Publicly accessible First Nation, federal and provincial financial policies on PSE expenditures.
- Consultation and access to PSE program delivery, management policies and practices that support First Nations control and decision making over education.
- Support for community interest and engagement in PSE.
- Publicly accessible First Nation, federal and provincial policies in mutually agreed upon areas of impact.
- Revised reporting mechanisms and processes that address user data requirements and are user friendly.
- Performance measures and annual dissemination of outcome performance data.
- Accountability of provincial institutions to First Nations for results and outcomes.
- Longitudinal student tracking and reporting.
- Transparency and building good relationships and partnerships.

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- Improvement of First Nation/ Provincial relations through collaboration and partnerships.

3) **DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING** which encompasses:

- National standards on how data is collected in order to ensure accuracy and usability.
- Mutually agreed upon data standardization collection methodologies.
- First Nation access to sustained funding for community based data collection.
- A central place for data to be housed that respects the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP).
- National First Nation specific indicators and measures of success.

4) **ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS** through national measures that include:

- Fiscal support and recognition of essential linkages to First Nation human resource development, capacity building and planning.
- Human resource inventories (such as a national data base of First Nations graduates).
- Student supports that include, but are not limited to, social counselling, housing, daycare, stipends, academic supports, tutoring, etc.
- Culturally relevant and appropriate programming in every aspect of the lifelong learning environment.
- Ensuring the funding of local, district and regional post-secondary coordinators to meet local PSE requirements.
- Ensuring the provision of training and professional development for PSE advisors and counselors.

5) **EFFECTIVENESS** which encompasses the resolution of:

- Gaps in services and mutual commitments to ensure adequate resources are available.
- Fairness and equitability of access across borders and between First Nation programs.
- Capacity building at the individual and community level.
- Language and culturally appropriateness at all program levels.
- Program effectiveness within PSE lifelong learning systems and infrastructure.
- Mutual revisiting of the quality of education on a consistent basis to ensure equity and fairness across delivery models and institutions.

6) **SUPPORT FOR FIRST NATIONS INSTITUTIONS** is inclusive of federal, provincial and First Nation recognition and support for the role and importance of First Nation learning institutions as represented through:

- National First Nations governance initiatives.
- Adequate capital and construction which includes operations and maintenance and technology acquisition.
- Band Support revenue sharing where necessary to ensure First Nation institutional continuity.

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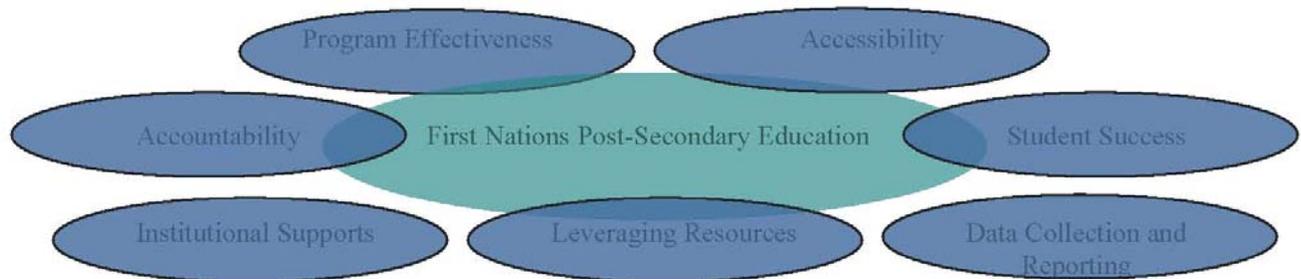
- Identifying and mobilizing human resources via a national data bank of First Nations expertise.
- Participating in continuing research and development in order to build Indigenous knowledge and governance capacity.
- The establishment and support of National First Nations Accreditation Boards.

7) **LEVERAGING OF OTHER RESOURCES** through

- Collaborative local, district and regional funding initiatives.
- Sharing of human resource knowledge and expertise.
- Mutual sustainability through pursuing long-term governance goals.
- Building linkages with other Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning (IIHL's).
- National roundtables on PSE program delivery promising practices and lifelong learning solutions.
- National research on what works, and why, that encompasses knowledge sharing components.
- Knowledge exchanges on health and social successes, housing, daycare, etc. within a holistic lifelong learning framework.

The following is a graphic representation of our proposed strategic approach to maximizing post-secondary education funding:

A MODEL FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMING



“Education is a pre-condition for full participation in society and the economy. Education is of strategic importance: improvement in education is a most powerful method for bringing about improvement in other social and economic outcomes.” (Bert Waslander Focusing INAC’s PSE Program: Targets and Impacts)

THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

If the current population boom of First Nations youth is not mobilized out of poverty by educating them and ensuring they are workforce ready, First Nations people will remain in poverty for generations to come. The youthful First Nations population represents an opportunity for prosperity, not only for First Nations communities, but for all Canadians.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, as well as the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development clearly state that the Canadian government must:

- **RECOGNIZE THAT EXPENDITURES ON FIRST NATIONS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION ARE AN INVESTMENT WITH SUBSTANTIAL RETURNS IN TERMS OF REDUCED COSTS IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE, HEALTH CARE AND UNEMPLOYMENT.**

The incidence of tuberculosis and diabetes among First Nations is three times that of the broader population. First Nations housing conditions are below acceptable standards for 65% of on-reserve households and 49% of off-reserve households. The figure for the non-First Nations population is 30%. Incarceration rates in federal and provincial jails in 1995-96 was at least five times greater for First Nation versus non-First Nations individuals. Suicide rates are 2.5 times higher among First Nations than the broader population. Homicide rates are six times higher than in the broader population.³

- **RESEARCH HAS DETERMINED THAT THE COST OF INCARCERATING AN INDIVIDUAL FOR ONE YEAR AT \$100,000.00 MINIMUM FAR EXCEEDS THE COST OF ONE YEAR OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION NOW CONTRIBUTED THROUGH PSE AT ROUGHLY \$13,200.00 PER STUDENT.**

Federal officials report that in 2008-2009 the PSSSP Program provided \$292 million to approximately 22,000 students to fund the costs of tuition, books, fees, transportation, and living expenses.⁴ When averaged out this amounts to about \$13,273 per student per year. In reality, however, the annual cost of an undergraduate degree in 2008-2009 was about \$19,588. Based on that cost assumption a four year degree would cost about \$80,498 for a student living away from home.⁵ Currently the capped PSE program does not meet the real needs of First Nations students.⁶ Clearly, educating First Nation youth and adults makes fiscal and socio/cultural sense particularly at a more equitable level of at least \$20,000.00 per student on an annual basis.

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- **WELFARE IS MORE THAN TWENTY TIMES AS EXPENSIVE AS A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.**

While Canada's social safety net has suffered from years of government cuts, First Nations communities are bearing even more of the burden. Spending on First Nations is half the amount provided for average Canadians: \$7,000-\$8,000 compared to \$15,000-\$16,000. Since 2000, First Nations budgets have declined by almost 13 per cent. In contrast, Canada Health and Social Transfers to provinces are growing at an average rate of 6.6 per cent per year⁷

First Nations have been incredibly successful with the limited resources that have been made available under the PSE program especially in a context of fiscal restraint and a global economic recession. Further, First Nations have exhibited an extraordinary patience with processes and government directives that have forced them to deny education to thousands of eligible students because of chronic under resourcing of the PSE program. No one is more painfully aware of the deficits in education than the national First Nations community.

Education funding and support for post-secondary education is essential to First Nations capacity building and governance. The building of an educated and self-governing population that reflects and encompasses all aspects of what is necessary for comprehensive nation building requires access to post-secondary education in a lifelong learning context. The cost for such access remains a fiduciary obligation under Canada's Constitution.

We cannot continue to develop our learners, families and communities and ready our nations for self-government and nation building without this essential foundation.



TAKING ACTION

The Federal Government must uphold the honour of the Crown. The Government of Canada has before them an opportunity to address the ongoing development of First Nations Post-Secondary education programs and education systems and invest in the future of First Nations as the very foundation of this country.

It is imperative that there is continued and long term sustainable fiscal support to strengthen First Nations education authorities, regional education organizations, systems and institutions. It is also an opportunity to strengthen educational foundations for First Nations students with strong effective decision-making and policy development that targets First Nations governance and long term capacity building. Therefore, Canada must:

- 1) Respect the authority of First Nations to exercise control over education.
- 2) Acknowledge the successful lifelong learning journey of First Nations learners in a First Nations context.
- 3) Recognize that since 1988 First Nations have administered the PSE program more successfully within the limitations of the INAC guidelines and produced significantly better student outcomes and results.
- 4) Acknowledge that First Nations have established and maintained academic and collegial affiliations that incorporate and acknowledge the value of Indigenous learning and knowledge epistemology.
- 5) Ensure adequate resources for ongoing research and production of Indigenous knowledge.
- 6) Provide progress reports from Canadian colleges and universities that demonstrate how they are ensuring that First Nations students succeed and graduate from their programs.
- 7) Accept that First Nations require a solid commitment from Canadian institutions that they are making a serious effort to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and learning styles into their curriculum and academic programs.

“Canada cannot afford the cost of doing nothing”.... “Our future – the future of First Nations - is Canada’s future. The time to act is now. First Nation citizens, and all Canadians, deserve nothing less.”
(From Poverty to Prosperity: Opportunities to Invest in First Nations, AFN 2007)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Panel respectfully recommends that the PSE program be strengthened and financed at a level that ensures all First Nation students have an opportunity to attend institutions of higher learning of their choice.

In 2009, estimates indicated that First Nations funding requirements were at \$642 million, which was more than twice the actual budget (\$314 million) allocated for PSE. A more representative number was further estimated for the year to close the 30% gap in university enrolment, thereby, adding \$370 million more to the already inadequate 2009 totals.

All First Nation learners are entitled to the resources and opportunities required to nurture lifelong learning and facilitate the acquisition of skills and knowledge in order that they may be outstanding citizens and make long term contributions as a legacy to their families, communities, nations, and the global community.

The Panel encourages thoughtful dialogue and reflection among First Nations and federal representatives and recommends that in order to strengthen and enhance the current PSE program, the following actions are required:

1. That the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the PSE be eliminated immediately, that spending increases be based on actual costs associated with program components and not subject to discretionary caps, and that INAC make adequate funding under the PSE program a priority for every eligible First Nations learner. Such expenses may include, but are not limited to, child care, special needs, and special shelter.⁸
2. That ACTUAL COSTS of attending PSE be allocated and secured as a *statutory educational program* (with greater aggregation of PSE administrative costs, regional approaches to cost and the recognition that resourcing alliances must be First Nation driven).
3. That adequate and sustainable resources be immediately provided for effective and efficient PSE program delivery through a separate allocation ensuring appropriate separation and support for program administration as distinct from funding for students thereby acknowledging the role of PSE coordinators as a fundamental part of student access, retention and graduation rates.
4. That reciprocal relations with academic institutions be required and promoted as essential to the success of Aboriginal learners
5. That First Nations, federal, provincial and territorial governments and leadership recognize, champion and support Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning.

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6. That a comprehensive funding framework mutually approved by First Nations and the Government of Canada be required to address ALL elements of post-secondary education.
7. That evidence based data collection be required to definitively establish current and ongoing costs of PSE. Cost breakdowns must include, but not be limited to, tuition, books, housing, daycare, clothing, travel, etc. (in order to address the \$5,000/\$6,000 deficit per student) including indirect costs (such as family care/assistance).
8. That national standards of data collection and reporting be developed that will result in clear supportable outcomes characterized by strong, credible and usable data and further that a central place under First Nations control be required for data storage in order to secure quick and effective access to evidence based statistics by First Nations and INAC.
9. That the PSE program be First Nations driven and administered, thereby reflecting true First Nation jurisdiction and self-governance over education.
10. That attention be directed to the critical need to establish a national human resource data base of PSE graduates and academics.
11. That a statutory mandate be affirmed and implemented requiring Government of Canada federal departments support Indigenous institutions and that they provide annual public reports on their progress toward achieving PSE commitments to First Nation students and institutions.
12. That core funding mechanisms are developed that will sustain post-secondary education fiscal and human resource support that is adequate, long term, and sustainable into the future.

“The bold mandate that we have is to encourage, empower, inspire, and provide assistance so that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youths can convert their tremendous potential, their aspirations, and their dreams into solid achievement and brighter futures. We make it possible for them to contribute their gifts to their communities, to Canada, and to the world” (Roberta Jamieson, *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, 2007)

STRENGTHENED PROGRAM DELIVERY OPTIONS

First Nations across Canada have demonstrated a remarkable resiliency and creativity when it comes to ensuring that the needs of learners of all ages and backgrounds are met.

The First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity, and Outcomes Panel recommends the following options for facilitating the First Nations/Federal/Provincial/Territorial discussion on how the continued success of community level delivery of PSE programs would be maximized through First Nations administration of PSE. These options are designed to enable diversity and autonomy among First Nations and it is acknowledged regions will adopt these based on their local requirements and needs.

The Post-Secondary Education program, specifically the PSSSP component, will provide support to First Nation students to *enrol and succeed* in post-secondary education programs. Effective and adequate resources are required to support accessible and effective program administration, as well as, to ensure transparency and accountability for the program.

A strengthened program will:

1. Increase financial allocations to reflect actual PSE needs of First Nations communities and learners.
2. Recognize the role of Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Coordinators in each First Nation community through the establishment of funding and support. PSE coordinators will:
 - a. Be the primary connection between the learner and post-secondary education as an *advisor, counselor, advocate, liaison and technical support person* in order to facilitate student access, retention and completion rates,
 - b. Respond to First Nation strategic directions through post-secondary education learners' access and achievement; and
 - c. Be the critical link between the learner, First Nation community and the administrative body of the PSSSP program (as it relates to the data collection, policy effectiveness and improvements at the community level through post-secondary education programming).
3. Establish a separate funding allocation for the administration of PSSSP in order to maximize the total dollars available for the financial support of PSE learners.
4. Establish standards of practice and support professional development to ensure the effective administration of the PSSSP overall and to support First Nation capacity building within the context of the post-secondary education program.

The following graphic illustrates the detailed program delivery options as follows:

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PROPOSED PROGRAM DELIVERY OPTIONS

First Nations	District	Regional
<p>PSSSP funds are transferred to the First Nation for administration.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish funding line for staffed position of PSE coordinator (advisor, counselor, advocate, liaison and technical support). • Increase overall budget to include administration of PSSP. • Establish PSSSP policy (if one is not already in place) and develop an affective application, processing and appeals mechanism. • Establish an arms length entity appointed by the local First Nation to oversee administration of financial support. The arms length entity will respond to goals set by the First Nation, provide direction to the Administrator, review and approve intake submissions and present annual reports to the First Nation. 	<p>PSSSP funds are transferred to a group of First Nations, a single organization with responsibility for administration, as well as, coordination and accountability at the local First Nations level.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish funding line for staffed position of PSE coordinator (advisor, counselor, advocate, liaison and technical support) in each member First Nation. • Increase overall budget to include administration of PSSSP. • Establish PSSSP policy (if one is not already in place) and develop and effective application and a processing and appeals mechanism. • Establish an arms length entity appointed by member First Nations to oversee the administration of financial supports. The arms length entity will respond to goals set by the First Nation in PSE, provide direction to the Administrator and review and approve intake submissions and present annual reports to First Nation members. 	<p>PSSSP funds are transferred to the region, a single regional entity with responsibility for administration, as well as, coordination and accountability at the local First Nations level.</p> <p>Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a funding line for a staffed position of PSE coordinator (advisor, counselor, advocate, liaison and technical support) in each member First Nation. • Increase overall budget to include administration of PSSSP. • Establish an arms length entity appointed by the member First Nations in the region to oversee administration of financial support. The arms length entity will respond to goals set by the First Nation in PSE, provide direction to the Administrator and review and approve intake submissions and present annual reports to First Nation members.

The Indian Studies Support Program

Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning (IIHLs) have programs to bridge the gap between secondary and post-secondary education. Most offer basic skills training, literacy, adult basic education, upgrading, and alternate secondary school programs. They also offer certificates, diplomas, degree programs (in partnership with mainstream institutions), culture and language programs and community workshops. By training future educators and leaders, IIHLs are able to improve the rates of attendance, retention, and success of First Nations people, in preparation for and to facilitate, lifelong learning.

Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning are unique institutions within the Canadian post-secondary education system. Initiated, governed, managed, and taught by Indigenous people, they offer students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) a viable alternative to mainstream colleges and universities. With foundations in Indigenous culture, IIHLs reinforce Indigenous identity while providing a solid academic education in a supportive environment. The unique qualities of IIHLs include:

1. Boards of Directors at IIHLs are directed and controlled by Indigenous communities;

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2. IIHL's have Indigenous faculty who take a holistic approach to education (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual);
3. Curriculum is infused with First Nation history, culture, traditions, and values;
4. Instructional techniques and methods address Indigenous learning styles;
5. Indigenous communities are involved and integrated throughout the educational process;
6. There are linkages and referrals made between the institutes and various community organizations;
7. Indigenous support staff create a focus on *student support* and *support networks*;
8. IIHLs integrate Elder support, spiritual and traditional teachings. Mainstream institutions do not.

Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning address inequities by working with students, families and communities to target and support students who have historically had low educational achievement levels but who have the potential to succeed in an appropriate post-secondary school environment. IIHLs offer transition and access programs which are designed to enable students to work to overcome their personal and educational barriers and gain the support and confidence they need to succeed at the post-secondary level. Many of the graduates of access and transition programs go on to be successful at mainstream institutes.

The key challenge facing IIHLs is financial. The Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) has played a role in supporting IIHLs. The limitation, however, is in order to allow IIHLs to fully develop as permanent structures in the lifelong learning landscape, they require multi-year core funding for operations and institutional management. They also require per student funding allocations, capital grants (to provide modern facilities such as libraries and laboratories), grants for program evaluation and development, increased funding for student support services, and research grants. With this type of support, IIHLs will be able to maintain their role as leaders in Indigenous higher education.

The *need* for supporting IIHLs is clear and compelling in the following ways:

- Indigenous post-secondary graduates become significant and positive economic and social contributors to First Nation and mainstream society;
- Indigenous Institutes facilitate the enrolment and graduation of First Nation students who otherwise would not receive a post-secondary education;
- Therefore, Indigenous Institutes must be adequately resourced.

The academic and institutional independence of IIHLs is a continuing goal related to empowerment. The future of our nations and the expansion of First Nations capacity is contingent on quality education and the opportunity of First Nation citizens to access *lifelong learning* in a context of culture, language and homogeneity in an environment of nurturing and trust. In so doing we guarantee student success and long term capacity building at a national level that is First Nation driven, First Nation controlled and First Nation accountable.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The following descriptions illustrate eight promising practices that focus on maximizing PSE funding and demonstrate the flexibility and creativity of First Nations nationally. They graphically describe how First Nations meet the needs of their students through the pooling of limited resources and hiring of local, district and regional coordinators and counselors.

1. The *Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program* (NS) is a unique Ottawa-based facility established in 1985 by the land claim organization representing Inuit of the eastern Arctic. Here 22 graduates from what is now the Territory of Nunavut, beneficiaries under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, are selected each year from a much broader pool of applicants to attend an eight-month program aimed at preparing them for further post-secondary education or for employment in Nunavut. Originally intended to train fieldworkers to keep remote communities informed about land claims negotiations, the NS Program has subsequently become a general transition year program. Courses centred on Inuit history, culture, politics and land claims issues, as well as, language training are accredited through Algonquin College. A second year program for up to 10 students is focused on preparation for university.
2. The *First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)* and First Nations have worked closely with INAC BC Region to design and implement a unique approach to allocating federal PSSSP funding. This approach takes into account fluctuating community needs and student population levels that vary from year-to-year. A process was developed to allocate PSE funding that is available through INAC for CFA First Nations. The process enables a portion of the BC Region PSE funds to be allocated to each CFA First Nation using a per capita formula. On an annual basis, each CFA First Nation's initial allocation is calculated according to its audited statement of previous eligible PSE expenditures. In order to receive its full per capita allocation (referred to as the "protected pool"), each First Nation is required to submit information to INAC indicating that the Nation has a sufficient number of eligible applicants to use their full per capita funding amount. A second portion of the BC Region PSE allocation is captured in what is referred to as a "general pool." First Nations that have additional eligible students, who could not be funded through the Nation's per capita allocation, are eligible to apply for funding from the general pool, which is the collection of all unused protected pool funds. Although this practice has been very effective each year, the amount requested by First Nations far exceeds the amount of PSE funding available in the region.
3. The *Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC)* in northern Saskatchewan uses community surveys to build on baseline data from a variety of governmental sources such as Statistics Canada and the Saskatchewan Trends Monitor. They articulate the importance of comprehensive community-based data gathering and tracking in the education sphere. The monitoring of demographic changes and

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- educational results over time at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, as well as, labour market figures, gives the PAGC key information and enables key connections about systems improvements or declines. Ultimately, the information assists the PAGC to determine where and what decisions are called for in the interests of the community.
4. *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK)*, located in Sydney, Nova Scotia, manages the education jurisdiction for ten First Nation participating communities in Nova Scotia. MK is funded by INAC through an agreement with respect to funding for Mi'kmaq Education in Nova Scotia. Participating communities receive a guaranteed base annual budget for post-secondary education. Increases to the communities' base post-secondary budgets are driven by demonstrated need and funded centrally by MK from the ISSP with annual price and volume increases applied to the base grant. Also, as a result of MK's partnership with several universities in the Atlantic provinces many participating communities are taking advantage of MK's high speed video conferencing capabilities to offer post-secondary programming at the community level. This post-secondary programming delivery mechanism provides communities with significant savings and the opportunity to fund more students. In addition, MK has implemented a computerized information management system (DADAVAN) to track information on all post-secondary students that receive funding.
 5. The *Aboriginal Students Services Centre (ASSC)* at the University of Winnipeg addresses the importance of having a Centre to support the post-secondary careers of Aboriginal students. They initiated a precedent-setting 2005 "partnering" between the University and an Aboriginal organization, the Southeast Resource Development Council representing 9 Manitoba First Nation communities in relation to the opening of the University's Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre.
 6. The *First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC)*, based in Calgary Alberta is founded on the premise that it is our own infrastructures and mechanisms that can comprehensively address the development needs of our constituent First Nations through the promotion and enhancement of our respective cultures. FNAHEC currently has a membership of 7 colleges from Alberta and Manitoba, and 4 adult education centres. Individually and collectively these institutions have designed and implemented programs, courses and services to address some of the gaps not addressed by other institutions. Various articulation agreements exist with mainstream institutions that can attest to the invaluable grounding that the FNAHEC institutions provide to students that transfer from the FN institutions. Some exciting joint initiatives currently underway are the design of an Indigenous Social Work Degree, a Language Teacher Diploma/Degree, and a Transfer Guide for the National Indigenous Accreditation Board and a First Nations Cosmology course to launch a series of distributed e-learning courses. Members of FNAHEC have also taken the civic responsibility to offer a wide range of workshops and seminars to address the needs not only of FNMI communities but also of mainstream communities.

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7. The *First Nations Technical Institute* (FNTI) opened in 1985 as a result of partnerships among the Tyendinaga Mohawk Council, the FNTI Board, the Department of Indian Affairs and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. FNTI's approaches to Aboriginal post-secondary over the years includes alternative delivery methods such as intensive course offerings, use of video-conferencing technology and community delivering of programming. They believe that, "by taking education to the people, we have removed one barrier to access. By changing the delivery schedule we have removed another. Our final step is to create active, participatory learning environments which respond to the cultural and socio-economic needs of our learners" (Thompson, 2006).
8. In 2009 and 2010 *Northwest Community College* held week long "Challenging the Paradigm" gatherings as starting points for a focused effort to transform the culture and practice of the college, and to examine how to integrate Aboriginal and mainstream pedagogical paradigms. The gatherings engaged First Nation leaders, learners and leaders from colleges across the country who are dramatically influencing the culture of mainstream institutions. The first gathering led to a *Year of Dialogue Celebrating Aboriginal Learning*. NWCC also holds events such as the Celebration of the Wisdom of Elders and Celebration of Aboriginal Musicians.

The successful PSE programs described herein speak to the wide spectrum of creative post-secondary education supports that First Nations youth are entitled to and deserve. It is incumbent upon the Government of Canada to acknowledge and sustain the accomplishments made by First Nations by endorsing the PSE programs nationally and providing the necessary resources to finally "lift up the morale of the people"⁹ in order to ensure that First Nations children will always have as bright a future as any other child in Canada.



"If our students struggle through their childhood to get to the point where they can go on to advanced training, advanced education, and then find that the resources aren't there for them to move on, the tragedy is so painful we simply cannot allow it to happen" (National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation. *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, 2007)

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ENDNOTES

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