

POLICY PAPER

Aboriginal Students

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Acknowledgement: The authors of this paper do not self-identify as being of Aboriginal descent. During the research of this paper, the following consultation was undertaken:

- Interviews with staff at the following Aboriginal Student Centres:
 - Queen's University, Four Directions Student Centre
 - Wilfrid Laurier University, Aboriginal Students Centre
 - Trent – Oshawa University, First People's House of Learning
 - Western University, Indigenous Student Services
- Queen's University, Aboriginal Student Focus Group, hosted by the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre
- Wilfrid Laurier University, Aboriginal Student Focus Group, hosted by the Aboriginal Student Centre
- Western University, Aboriginal Students Focus Group, hosted by Indigenous Student Services

Representatives of OUSA also attended meeting with the Aboriginal Education Branch at the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and with stakeholders at the Council of Ontario Universities. The authors of this paper also participated at the Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education conference in Fall 2013.

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to address the systemic barriers that impact the ability of Aboriginal peoples to access, persist and succeed in post-secondary education. Given histories of discrimination and chronic underfunding of Aboriginal education at both the K-12 and post-secondary level, OUSA believes that action must be taken by all levels of government and institutions. This is particularly pressing as recent figures have shown that the attainment gap for Aboriginal peoples¹ may in fact be widening. OUSA affirms the importance of self-determination for Aboriginal peoples, and stresses that any policy intervention must be undertaken in direct partnership and consultation with Aboriginal communities.

OUSA suggests that the following steps be taken in order to address the barriers that Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education:

Asserting the shared responsibilities of both federal and provincial governments, and post-secondary institutions, to take action:

- The provincial and federal governments and post-secondary institutions should take action to raise Aboriginal post-secondary access, participation and attainment rates.

Acknowledging the importance that formative educational experiences can have on post-secondary attainment:

¹ Based on data from the Census (1996, 2001, 2006) and National Household Survey (2011). As presented in Gordon & White (2013) *The Supply Side of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* as presented at the Indigenous Issues

- The provincial and federal governments must improve the public education system available to Aboriginal students; including culturally relevant material at all levels of education and robust student support services;
- Aboriginal content, including treaty rights and Métis perspectives, should be better integrated into the curriculum taught to all Ontario students at the primary and secondary school levels;
- The provincial and federal governments must provide resources to support early outreach programming for Aboriginal students in reserve and non-reserve settings;
- Partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities should be encouraged and incentivized by government to enhance access;
- Early outreach programs should be within the control of Aboriginal communities, and tailored to each community's specific needs;
- The government should work to ensure that adequate funding is available to hire qualified Aboriginal teachers, including investigating alternative methods of accreditation;
- Ontario's teachers should be required to complete a module on Aboriginal education as part of their training, and school boards should ensure that professional development opportunities on Aboriginal issues are made available;
- Guidance counsellors should receive regular skills updating on concerns pertaining to Aboriginal students.

Calling for better financial assistance to be made available for Aboriginal students:

- The provincial government should push the federal government to uncap and annually increase the Post-Secondary Student Support Program funding to levels that will provide full support to all Aboriginal students in financial need and reflect the rising costs of education;
- The provincial government should expand the Aboriginal Bursary program to meet the unmet financial need of all Aboriginal students;
- The provincial government should expand the Access to Opportunities Strategy by investing in the creation of a new grant program for Aboriginal students;
- The provincial government should partner with post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal Education Councils to ensure the Aboriginal Bursary is used efficiently;
- The provincial government should increase funding for the Ontario Distance Grant;
- Institutions should partner with the provincial government to create strategies to improve the available information on financial assistance available to Aboriginal students;
- The provincial government should extend OTG eligibility for Aboriginal students to cover their entire time spent attaining an undergraduate education, regardless of date of graduation;
- The provincial government should make a multi-year plan to contribute to the bursary fund of Métis Nation of Ontario Education and Training, to ensure the sustainability of the fund and enable more Métis students to access financial assistance;
- The provincial government should eliminate late fees for all students receiving band funding.

Addressing the need for comprehensive student support services in order to ensure Aboriginal student success:

- The provincial government must work with local Aboriginal Education Council and Aboriginal communities to assess the student support service needs of Aboriginal students, including Aboriginal student centres, and provide funding based on their recommendations;
- All post-secondary institutions should have, at minimum, an Aboriginal student centre, an Aboriginal counsellor, and Aboriginal-specific secondary to post-secondary transitional services;
- All Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) should have student representation, and institutions should make an effort to communicate the existence and purpose of the AEC to all Aboriginal students in particular, but also the student body more generally;
- The provincial and federal governments must provide funding for culturally appropriate day care services for Aboriginal students with dependants;
- The provincial and federal governments should provide funding for affordable and accessible day care services;
- The institutions and provincial government should dedicate consistent, annual funding for Aboriginal student centres, which should be responsive to enrollment increases.

Exploring the role in which post-secondary education can improve Aboriginal peoples employment outcomes, and the need for greater supports in order to achieve this:

- The provincial and federal governments should devote resources towards increasing Aboriginal PSE attainment in order to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes;
- Government should provide funding to increase WIL opportunities for Aboriginal students, focusing in industries where Aboriginal peoples are underrepresented;
- Government should facilitate the creation of partnerships between NGOs and post-secondary institutions to support Aboriginal student employment;
- Government should introduce employment initiatives targeted towards Aboriginal and university student needs;
- Investments should be made to increase opportunities for Aboriginal student entrepreneurship;
- Government should incentivize the creation of Aboriginal focused employment services, or expand services where they currently exist.

Calling for institutions to consider how they can provide a more welcoming, safer space for Aboriginal students:

- The federal and provincial governments with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders should take concrete action towards the elimination of racism, providing access to Aboriginal course content, Aboriginal faculty, administrative and support staff;
- The provincial government must review the current partnership model of funding for Aboriginal-managed institutions to ensure that students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions are adequately funded. This should

- include collaboration with the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium, as its institutions work towards meeting the criteria for independent accreditation;
- Institutions should provide anti-racist Aboriginal cultural training for administrators, faculty and staff;
- Institutions should seek to include Aboriginal perspectives in undergraduate curriculum, and ensure that Aboriginal courses or programs have the required number of faculty needed to meet student demand;
- In order to provide a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal students, institutions should commit to recognizing and incorporating Aboriginal culture on their campus in a meaningful way;
- Institutions that are located on traditional territories should commit to recognition of Aboriginal land claims;
- Admissions policies should be more widely available and included in high level strategic planning.

Recognizing the need for robust data and comprehensive metrics to ensure the evaluation of programming can occur:

- The provincial government must make resources available to facilitate information gathering on Aboriginal students within post-secondary education;
- The provincial government in partnership with Aboriginal peoples must begin to annually audit Aboriginal enrolment, attainment, retention and graduation rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario, and set public goals and objectives for Aboriginal post-secondary attainment;
- The provincial government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and students, should explore metrics for measuring Aboriginal success and support universities in implementing institutional changes based on the findings;
- Institutions should consider implementing the Council of Ontario Universities' self-identification instrument, in consultation with Aboriginal students and AECs. Where self-identification protocols are implemented, institutions should offer training resources to staff, faculty, and student organizations that may find themselves offering support to Aboriginal students;
- The provincial government should develop mechanisms to encourage information sharing and transparency among institutions;
- Oversight over universities should be given to the Ontario Ombudsman.

Introduction

Aboriginal peoples in Canada face multiple and systemic barriers to attaining and succeeding in post-secondary education. A long history of discrimination, including the legacy of residential schools, and continued government underfunding of Aboriginal education has contributed to Aboriginal people having some of the highest high school drop out rates, lowest post-secondary education attainment rates, and lowest labour market outcomes of any group in Canada.

For the purpose of this paper, "Aboriginal" is used to refer to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. OUSA recognizes that Aboriginal peoples are diverse groups with widely differing experiences and cultures, speaking a wide array of languages, living in both remote reserves and metropolitan areas. It is important to acknowledge that the

experiences of various Aboriginal peoples in the post-secondary system varies widely, and this paper seeks to acknowledge those differences where possible.

Despite the provincial government's commitment to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal people at both the K-12 and post-secondary level, evidence shows that as post-secondary attainment amongst the general population is rising, attainment gaps may in fact be widening. Indeed, the participation gap for Aboriginal youth in Ontario is particularly high, at 28 per cent compared to 15 per cent nationally.²

The attainment gap amongst Aboriginal peoples is concerning for a number of reasons. Post-secondary education leads to better labour market outcomes: for Aboriginal people who had not completed a high school diploma the employment rate was 30.1 per cent, compared to 55.8 per cent for their non-Aboriginal peers. This employment gap largely closed with the attainment of a bachelor's degree to 79 per cent for Aboriginal degree holders, compared to 81.6 per cent in the non-Aboriginal population.³ Post-secondary education also has significant social benefits: Ontarians with a post-secondary degree are more likely to live longer, be healthier, commit fewer crimes, vote in larger numbers, donate to charity, and volunteer in their communities.⁴ Finally, it is particularly important to address the post-secondary attainment gap for Aboriginal people, as this is one of the few areas of the Canadian population where the number of young people are growing: Aboriginal youth aged 15-24 are 18.2 per cent of the Aboriginal population (compared to 12.9 per cent among the non-Aboriginal population). It is imperative that the government adopts strategies now that ensure future generations of young people are able to attain their post-secondary pathways of choice.

This paper identifies a range of barriers that impact upon Aboriginal young people including: informational, motivational, financial and social/cultural. Additionally, we explore post-secondary education as a means to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes, and strategies to track and evaluate the success of Aboriginal access programs. In order to address the barriers that Aboriginal young people face, and to increase the post-secondary attainment rate of Aboriginal students, the federal and provincial governments must work to support all willing and qualified Aboriginal students who hope to attend a post-secondary institution.

Principles

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

All willing and qualified students in Ontario must be able to access and excel within Ontario's post-secondary system, regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, geographic location, or any other external factor. Students recognize the advantage of higher education from both a social and economic perspective. The societal benefits of a highly educated population serve to relieve the poverty cycle, reduce crime rates, and increase civic participation and engagement with social affairs.⁵ Aside from the notion

² Finnie, R., Childs, S., and Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

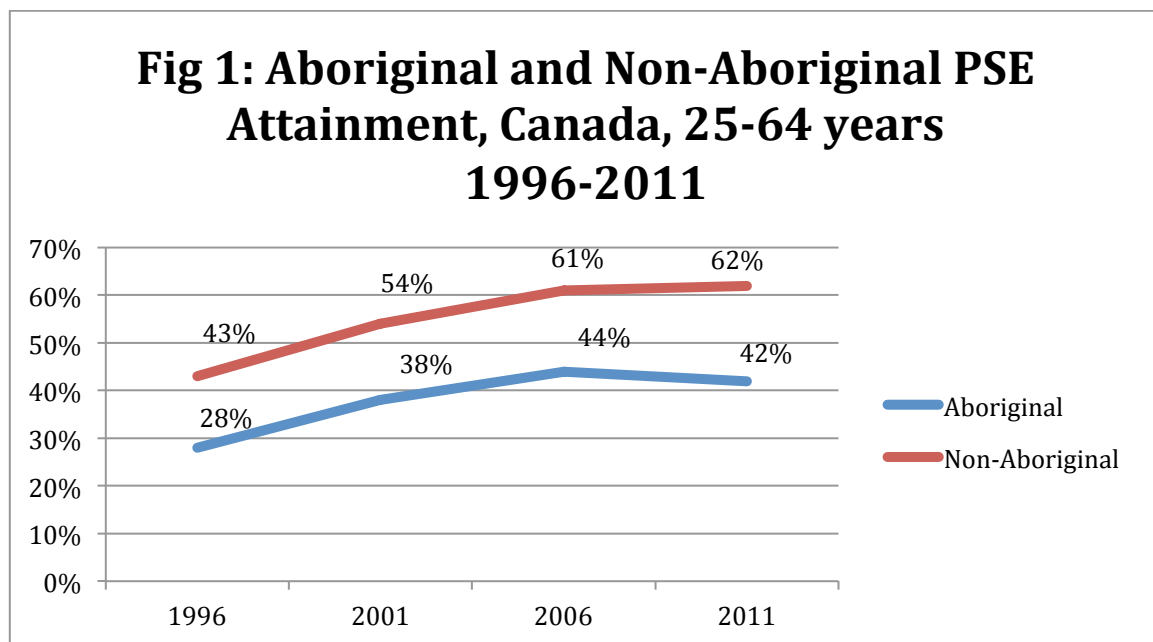
³ Statistics Canada (2011) *National Household Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Available online: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/index-eng.cfm>

⁴ Ross Finnie, Childs S. & Wismer A (2011) *Underrepresented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: HEQCO

⁵ TD Economics. (2004). *Investing in higher education delivers a stellar rate of return*. Toronto: TD Economics.

that all students should have an equal opportunity to access higher education, the economic need to engage underrepresented groups in PSE is clear. In economic terms, the oft-quoted statistic is that 70 per cent of jobs require some form of post-secondary education or training.⁶

While participation in PSE has been increasing steadily over the last decade, participation rates some groups that have been traditionally underrepresented, including Aboriginal students, have not kept pace.



As Figure 17 shows, PSE attainment has grown among both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal populations. However, with increasing enrolment the attainment gap between these groups has in fact widened, from a 15 point gap in 1996, to a 20 point gap in 2011.

Aboriginal peoples in Ontario tend to occupy a marginalized position in society. Due to a history of injustice, they have lower incomes than non-Aboriginal families, a higher incidence of suicide, are more likely to be incarcerated, and have life expectancies that are eight to ten years lower than those of non-Aboriginal Ontarians.⁸ Evidence suggests that successful completion of post-secondary education can help close the earnings gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals because “the gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates...declines with education until there is little difference among those with a university degree.”⁹ That all willing and qualified Aboriginal students can access and excel in Ontario’s post-secondary system is particularly important given that many Aboriginal communities face skilled-labour

⁶ Ontario Ministry of Finance. (2010). “Post-secondary Education,” *2010 Ontario Budget*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Finance.

⁷ Based on data from the Census (1996, 2001, 2006) and National Household Survey (2011). As presented in Gordon & White (2013) *The Supply Side of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* as presented at the Indigenous Issues in Education Conference, held in Toronto, November 2013.

⁸ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

⁹ Hull, Jeremy. (2005). *Postsecondary education and labour market outcomes*, Canada, 2001. Winnipeg: Prologica Research.

shortages in a number of fields crucial for community development and self-governance, including education, medical fields, and environmental sciences.

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

Both the federal and provincial governments have articulated a responsibility for improving access to post-secondary education for all Aboriginal students. The provincial government has signalled its commitment to Aboriginal post-secondary education through the adoption of the Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework,¹⁰ which the government is required to report-back on progress every three years.¹¹ Further, many Aboriginal nations believe that a fair interpretation of treaty rights obliges the federal government to fund post-secondary education in the same way that it funds primary and secondary school for status-First Nations and Inuit students.¹² The federal government disagrees with this view, but at the same time has taken responsibility for some funding of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, through the creation of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). While it is beyond the scope of this policy to judge whether a fair treaty interpretation mandates the full federal funding of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, students believe that all youth in Ontario should have an equitable opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions. In recognition of the historical and contemporary injustices Aboriginal people face in Ontario, both the provincial and federal government have a responsibility to improve access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students.

Concerns

Concern One: Aboriginal students continue to face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation.

While some barriers that Aboriginal students face in accessing post-secondary education are shared with other groups, like low-income and rural and northern students, it is important to recognize that Aboriginal students also face unique historical and cultural barriers to participation in higher education. Education was one of the major means through which European settlers attempted to assimilate Aboriginal peoples. The residential school system was intended remove students from their parents, and communities, to prevent the transmission of indigenous knowledge and language from generation to generation. Historically, urban and rural Aboriginal students attending provincially-funded schools have had to contend with Eurocentric curriculum that ignored Aboriginal issues. Similarly, Aboriginal students attending accredited post-secondary institutions have faced a hostile, culturally insensitive curriculum and system, which has not recognized Aboriginal cultural values and contributions to contemporary societies. Even more disturbing, up until 1960, any Aboriginal person who earned a post-secondary credential automatically lost their status as First Nations, a step meant to

¹⁰ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2011) *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario

¹¹ Meeting with Aboriginal Education Branch of MTCU, February 4, 2014.

¹² Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

recognize their integration into Euro-Canadian society.¹³ Higher education was then directly associated with assimilation, through the both Eurocentric curriculum content and the loss of Aboriginal status under the law. This legacy has contributed to a multitude of social problems in Aboriginal communities, and created an atmosphere of distrust regarding education between Aboriginal peoples and provincial and federal governments.

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

Aboriginal students, including those that self-identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, have particularly low PSE participation rates compared to non-Aboriginal students. In Ontario, Aboriginal individuals have comparable participation in trade certificates, apprenticeships, and college programs as non-Aboriginals. However, only 10 per cent of the Ontario Aboriginal population aged 25 to 64 has a university certificate or degree, as compared with 26 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.¹⁴ As PSE participation rates of non-Aboriginal Canadians has increased, the gap in education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals has widened from 12 per cent in university participation among the 55-64 year old age cohort to 19 per cent among the 25-44 year old age cohort.¹⁵ There is also a gap in Aboriginal participation in PSE based upon area of residence, as depicted in Figure 2.¹⁶

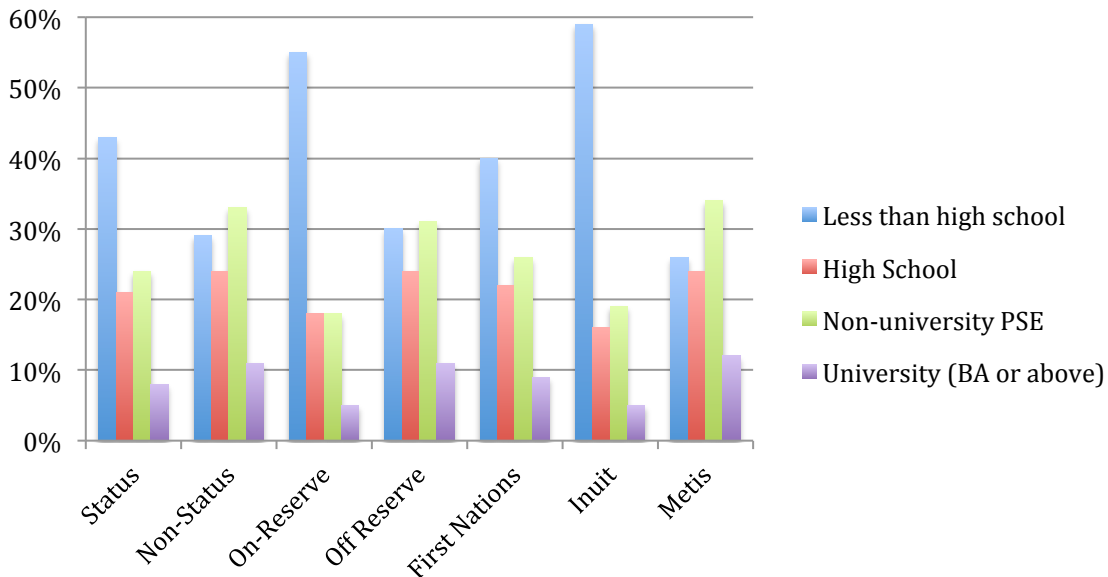
¹³ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

¹⁴ Zhao, Huizi (2012) *Postsecondary Education Participation of Underrepresented Groups in Ontario: Evidence from the SLID data*. Toronto: HEQCO.

¹⁵ Berger, Joseph, Anne Mott, and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The price of knowledge: access and student finance in Canada*. 4th edition. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁶ Adapted from: Mendelson, Michael. (2006). *Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Fig 2: Highest Educational Attainment amongst Aboriginal Peoples (25-64) by Status, Location and Identity Group - 2011



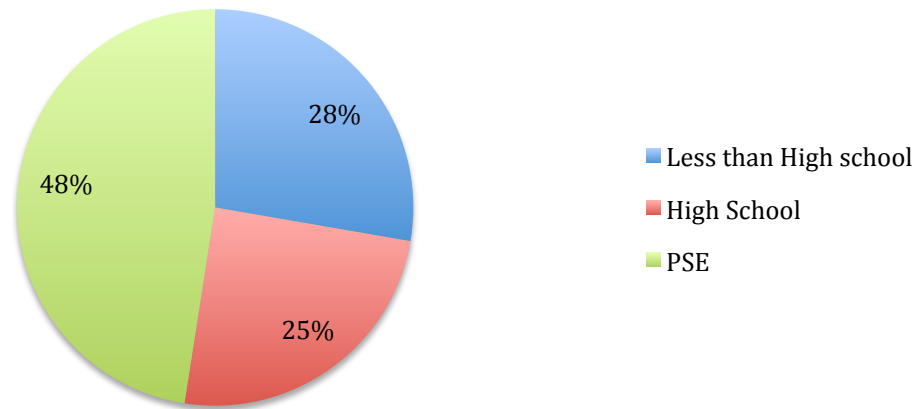
A significant part of this participation gap is due to the fact that Aboriginal youth have much higher secondary school dropout rates than non-Aboriginal youth.¹⁷ Aboriginal youth are more than twice as likely to have dropped out of secondary school as non-Aboriginal youth, with a third of all Aboriginal 25-68 year olds not having completed a secondary school diploma. This number rises as high as half of all youth for on-reserve and Inuit communities.¹⁸ Figure 3¹⁹ demonstrates the highest educational attainment of Aboriginal Ontarians:

¹⁷ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. (2009). *Post-secondary student access and retention strategies*. Literature review. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁸ Berger, Joseph, Anne Mott, and Andrew Parkin. (2009). *The price of knowledge: access and student finance in Canada*. 4th edition. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁹ Based on National Household Survey data, and adapted from Gordon & White (2013)

Fig. 3. Highest Educational Attainment for Aboriginal Ontarians (25-64) - 2011

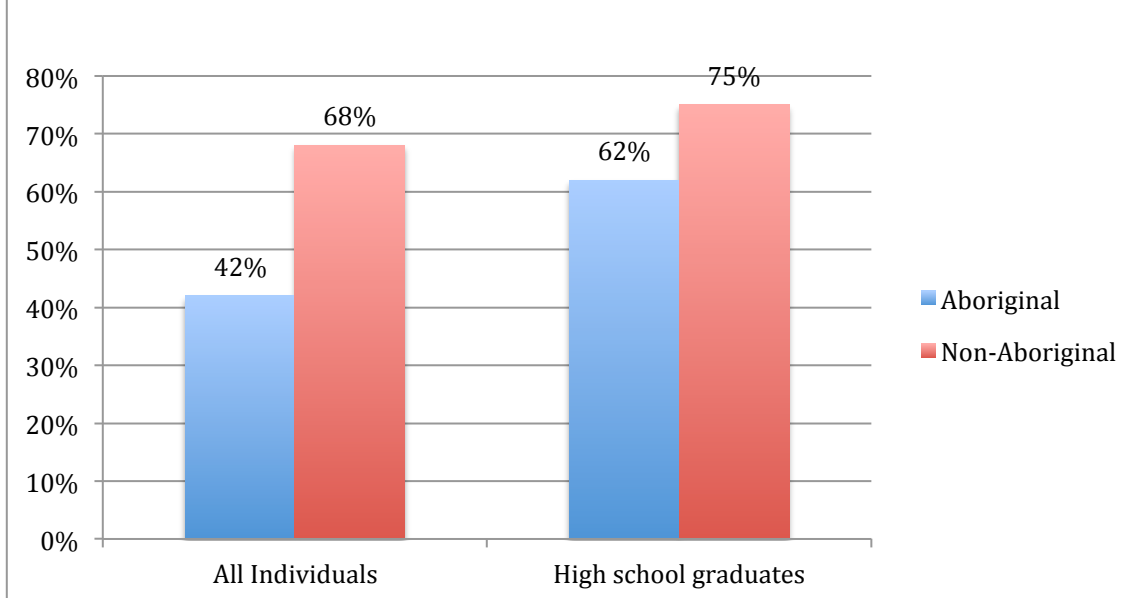


It is worth noting, as Figure 4²⁰ demonstrates, that Aboriginal students who have graduated secondary school have similar, though slightly lower, overall PSE participation rates as the non-Aboriginal population, indicating that increasing the secondary school completion rate is an important step in raising post-secondary participation of Aboriginal youth as a whole. However, this is not the only solution. Aboriginal applicants to post-secondary education in Ontario are twice as likely to decline offers of acceptance as non-Aboriginals.²¹

²⁰ Finnie, R., Childs, S., and Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²¹ McCloy, U., and Sattler, P. (2010). *From Postsecondary Application to the Labour Market: The Pathways of Under-represented Groups*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

**Fig. 4: Impact of Secondary School Completion
on Aboriginal PSE Attainment in Canada, Ages
25 - 24**

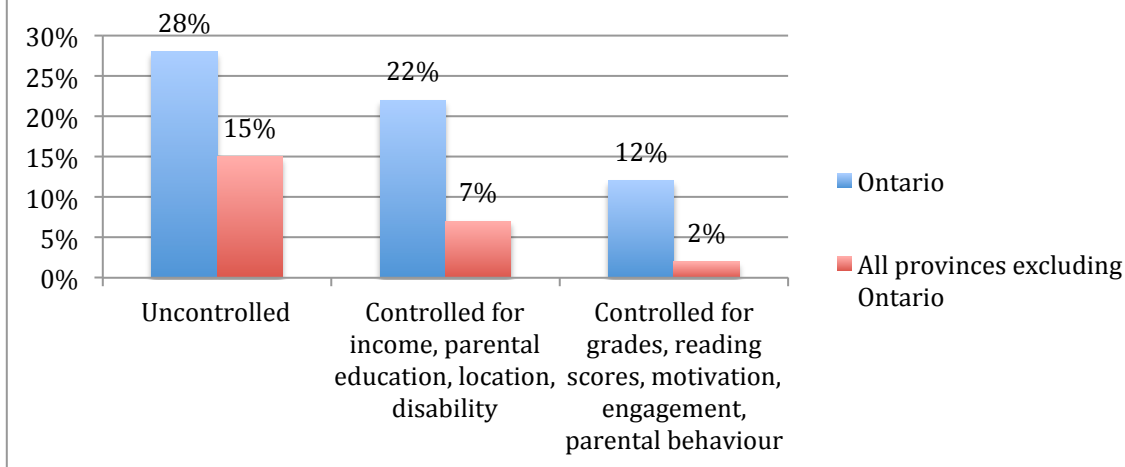


Evidence strongly suggests that the Ontario government is lagging behind in addressing gaps in Aboriginal post-secondary rates. As Figure 5²² shows, a study found that the Aboriginal university participation gap in Ontario stands at 28 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in all provinces excluding Ontario. Even after controlling for overlapping characteristics that affect PSE participation, like income, parental educational status, rural location, and disability, in Ontario the gap remains large. What this indicates is that being Aboriginal makes an individual far less likely to access post-secondary education in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada, and a significant portion of this gap cannot be explained by financial, parental, geographic and disability related factors alone. When indicators of academic success, student engagement, student motivation, and parental engagement with the school environment are accounted for, however, the discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Ontario nearly halves from 22 per cent to 12 per cent.²³ This supports the contention that a large gap in participation currently exists in Ontario, which could be attributed to programming needs that are not currently being fulfilled in the school environment. In particular, this strongly suggests that the current primary, secondary, and post-secondary school systems are often unsuccessful in engaging Aboriginal learners and supporting their success.

²² Finnie, R., Childs, S., and Wismer, A. (2011). *Under-Represented Groups in Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²³ Ibid.

Fig. 5: University Participation Gap of Ontario Aboriginal Youth Controlled for Various Factors



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

Inadequate support from the provincial and federal governments has created significant barriers for Aboriginal individuals in pursuing post-secondary education. Almost ten years ago, in 2005, the Prime Minister and Premiers met with Aboriginal leaders, where they collectively concluded that closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners would require an increase of 51,800 students by 2015, a goal that was projected to require an additional \$500 million dollar investment in the immediate future by provincial and federal governments.²⁴ In 2013, the funding through PSSSP made available to First Nations students was \$335 million:²⁵ the Assembly of First Nations, in analysing PSSSP expenditures in 2008 concluded that the funding shortfall was \$389 million.²⁶

Despite the recognition of the need for investment in order to raise the post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal students, the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) has continued to be capped arbitrarily at increases of 2 per cent per year during this period. Funding through the Ontario government for Aboriginal post-secondary education increased by \$11 million in 2010-11, but the government has indicated that any sustainable funding is yet to be determined.²⁷ Funding shortages at the post-secondary level are compounded by the chronic underfunding of education for

²⁴ Meeting of First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders. (2005). Kelowna, BC. Accessed at: http://www.aincinac.gc.ca/nr/iss/fmm_e.html

²⁵ Calculated from Assembly of First Nations – “Fact Sheet: First Nations Post-Secondary Education” 2008 figure, incorporating 2 per cent annual increases

²⁶ Assembly of First Nations, “Fact Sheet: First Nations Post-Secondary Education”

²⁷ Frechette, Jean-Guy. (2011). *Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy: Presentation to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*. Toronto: Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education.

Aboriginal students at the primary and secondary level. In addition to having implications for financial aid for Aboriginal students, underfunding also affects the other areas of Aboriginal post-secondary education discussed in this paper; inadequate funding has a bearing on the ability of communities to implement early outreach programs, the establishment of Aboriginal student support services, the development of Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogy, and the ability to undertake program evaluation.

Recommendations

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

In recognition of the challenges Aboriginal students face in accessing and persisting through post-secondary studies, as well as the fact that Aboriginal students are still significantly underrepresented at Ontario universities, the provincial and federal governments along with post-secondary institutions must take concrete steps to raise Aboriginal post-secondary attainment rates. While all students should pursue the path which is best suited for them, an Assembly of First Nations survey found that 7 of 10 First Nations youth aspired to attend post-secondary.²⁸ Students believe that an effective strategy to raise Aboriginal attainment rates is imperative and must include a wide variety of initiatives designed to holistically address the multiple barriers Aboriginal students face. These include: early outreach at the primary and secondary level, improved financial assistance programs, enhanced student support students on university campuses, addressing employment outcomes for Aboriginal students, institutional transformation initiatives, including the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into post-secondary curricula, and robust evaluation measures.

Early Outreach/K-12/Admissions

Principles

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

Children and youth require early support to develop the academic and personal skills they need to become strong contributors to their communities. A critical component of this development is the formal education system. All students in Ontario deserve equitable access to a primary and secondary school education system that meets their learning needs, and adequately prepares them to enter the work force, college or university. While education usually falls under provincial jurisdiction, First Nations and Inuit students are in a unique position. By virtue of longstanding treaties between Aboriginal nations and the federal government, Aboriginal education at the primary and secondary level for status First Nations and Inuit peoples is acknowledged as a federal responsibility. As a result, the federal government funds education for on-reserve status youth and also provides funding to the provincial government for status and Inuit youth attending provincial schools. In 2011-12 there were 11,669 First Nations students in

²⁸ Assembly of First Nations, "Fact Sheet: First Nations Post-Secondary Education"

Ontario attending band funded schools,²⁹ out of a total of 52,4000 Aboriginal students (including non-status, Metis and Inuit) enrolled in provincially funded schools.³⁰ For non-status First Nations and Métis youth, the federal government largely does not recognize treaty responsibility, and funding these students falls to the provincial government.³¹

It has been widely recognized that both the federal and provincial governments have historically failed to live up to their responsibility to support primary and secondary education for Aboriginal students. In the past, schools have been non-existent in many First Nations communities, and education outside of the community in residential schools was often abusive, assimilationist, and of poor quality.³² Recently the provincial and federal governments, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and organizations, have attempted to remedy some of the historical injustices concerning Aboriginal education in Canada. Efforts include the establishment of Aboriginal-controlled schools in reserve communities and the increased inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in curriculum. However, despite this avowed commitment, Aboriginal students from on-reserve schools demonstrate lower educational attainment. The Education Quality and Accountability Office found that only half of on-reserve students passed the Grade 10 literacy test, compared to the provincial average of 83 per cent.³³

This gap in achievement does not stem from any inherent lack of ability on the part of students themselves, but rather a number of social and educational issues deriving from the colonial legacy of Canada. The legacy of residential schools has created an atmosphere of distrust between many Aboriginal communities and the federal and provincial governments. In many cases, Aboriginal schools are still inadequately funded and lack basic technology and textbooks. In other cases, Aboriginal perspectives have been poorly integrated into the mainstream curriculum and remain neglected or treated superficially. The challenges Aboriginal students in reserve, rural and urban settings face speak to the continuing obligation of the federal and provincial governments to adequately support primary and secondary education for Aboriginal youth. Without a high quality, culturally responsive education system at the primary and secondary levels, Aboriginal youth will continue to be underrepresented at the post-secondary level.

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

In an effort to counter the damaging legacy of residential schools, new initiatives have placed control of primary, and sometimes secondary, education in the hands of Aboriginal communities on reserve communities. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples have been recognized as having a constitutional right to pass Indigenous knowledge on to the younger generation.³⁴ These rights are further affirmed by the United Nations

²⁹ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2013) *Federal funding levels for First Nations K-12 Education*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. Available online: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1349140116208/1349140158945>

³⁰ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario.

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

³² Ibid.

³³ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario.

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

Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples³⁵ - which although Canada initially opposed, was adopted in 2010.³⁶

Indigenous knowledge refers to the traditionally-rooted but changing body of information known to various community members through culture, observation, and lived experience.³⁷ Indigenous knowledge can include knowledge of plants, animals, natural phenomena, the development of hunting, fishing, agriculture and forestry techniques, as well as cosmologies and worldviews. An example of the former would be strategies for integrating selective logging into a specific geographic area without harming natural ecological cycles.³⁸ Examples of the latter would be the philosophical underpinnings of creation myths and other stories, holistic and reciprocal approaches to relationships, and appeals to oral history and elder knowledge as authoritative.³⁹ Indigenous knowledge is an evolving, changing body of work specific to particular Aboriginal communities. Indigenous knowledge systems have been recognized by the United Nations as critical to the survival of diverse communities and cultures, as well as having very concrete applications for contemporary global issues like tracking and resolving global issues like climate change.⁴⁰ An education system for Aboriginal students that includes Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal control of education has been understood as an essential component of building and maintaining community identity.⁴¹

The Assembly of First Nations holds the position that Aboriginal control of education ensures that Aboriginal students receive the necessary training for involvement in contemporary society, while reflecting the belief that parents and communities should be strongly involved in deciding what their children learn.⁴² This includes control over budgeting, determining the types of facilities needed to meet local needs, hiring staff and curriculum development. Many contemporary agreements between the federal government and Aboriginal nations explicitly devolve educational control to the nations.⁴³ Students believe that the trend towards increasing Aboriginal control of schools is an important one for fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment for Aboriginal students, providing an education that recognizes and affirms cultural identity, and counteracting the legacy of residential schools. Aboriginal control of education increases self-determination, while responding to the discrimination and neglect that Aboriginal peoples face in the mainstream education system.⁴⁴ Given the concerns that while Aboriginal control of reserve schools is recognized in principle, in practice communities lack sufficient resources to deliver educational programs, students believe

³⁵ United Nations General Assembly (2007) *United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

³⁶ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012) *Canada's Endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* Available online: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1309374807748/1309374897928>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Nadasdy, P. (2005). Transcending the debate over the ecologically noble Indian. *Ethnography*. 52(2), 292-328.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kawamura, H. (2004). Symbolic and political ecology among contemporary New Perce Indians in Idaho, USA". *Agriculture and Human Values*. 21, 157-169.

⁴¹ Battiste, Marie. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: a literature review with recommendations*. Ottawa, ON: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

⁴² Carr-Stewart, Sheila. (2006). The changing educational governance of First Nations schools in Canada: towards local control and educational equity. *Management in Education*: 20 (5), 6-12.

⁴³ Such as the 1998 Nisga'a Final Agreement (British Columbia) and the 1998 Mi'kmaq Education Act (Nova Scotia). In addition, in 2006 the provincial government of British Columbia undertook a Tripartite Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement as a process to develop federal and provincial legislation to recognize Aboriginal jurisdiction over education, and develop local educational programs.

⁴⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education: what educators have learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

that Aboriginal education initiatives should be supported by the federal and provincial governments.

Principle Five: All students should have access to Aboriginal programming and course content throughout the course of their primary and secondary education.

Currently, there is very little programming for students in primary and secondary schools that focuses on Aboriginal peoples and history. What is offered at this time is often a very narrow, Eurocentric look at some small pieces of Aboriginal history in Canada. It is rare that the information is presented from an Aboriginal perspective and usually focuses on the founding of Canada, without presenting much information about contemporary cultures.

The Ministry of Education released a framework in 2007 on education regarding Aboriginal issues, and committed to ensuring that all students would have the opportunity to learn about historical and contemporary traditions, cultures and perspectives from Métis, Inuit and First Nations communities. They also expressed that staff, teachers and school board employees would be exposed to the same information in order to better understand and teach the issues.⁴⁵

Principle Six: All students, whether in on or off reserve schools, should be able to access the high school credits necessary to attain post-secondary education.

All students in Ontario should be able to reasonably access the credits they need in order to be considered as an applicant to a post-secondary institution. Students in some rural communities have expressed difficulty in being able to take the credits they need due to the limited offerings at their institutions, and in some cases having to travel long distances, or even relocate, in order to gain the credits they require. This can disproportionately affect Aboriginal learners and disadvantage them in reaching post-secondary education. All students should be able to access the needed credits, without undue hardship such as relocation.

Principle Seven: Aboriginal students should have access to high quality and culturally appropriate guidance in order to assist them in making decisions about their post-secondary pathways.

Aboriginal students may face a unique set of concerns when considering and/or applying to post-secondary which requires high quality and culturally appropriate advice and guidance. It is integral that there are guidance counselors available to Aboriginal learners who can work with individuals to ensure that PSE is a possibility for them. These counselors should have an in-depth understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and traditions, band funding, provincial/federal financial assistance, and Aboriginal specific resources and policies at post-secondary institutions. Some of the issues facing Aboriginal students such as funding and policies at post-secondary institutions can be incredibly complex and it is important that this complexity is not a

⁴⁵ Ministry of Education (2007) *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework: Delivering Quality Education to Aboriginal Students in Ontario's Provincially Funded Schools*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Available online: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/fnmiframework.pdf>

barrier for students who wish to or would consider applying. Ensuring that counselors are not only supportive and knowledgeable but also sensitive and aware of cultural issues will help in making sure that students have a positive and successful experience. In general, for all students, counselors should be well versed in the benefits of attending PSE, such as the connections to employment outcomes. Guidance counselors can play a key role in helping any student to access or consider post-secondary education.

Principle Eight: Early outreach initiatives are important in improving access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students.

Early outreach is the engagement of youth in a dialogue about the benefits and opportunities of higher education, and the provision of support for student success in reaching and persisting through a program of study. Early outreach is vital given that nearly half of youth decide to attend PSE before Grade 9.⁴⁶ Outreach initiatives for Aboriginal students can include mentorship programs in primary and secondary schools, visits to post-secondary institutions, interaction with Elders, and academic supports.⁴⁷ Outreach programs are important for facilitating access to post-secondary education because they can help students develop the skills they need to succeed at the post-secondary level, gain familiarity with post-secondary institutions, and develop personal confidence and motivation.⁴⁸

Given both the harmful legacy of outreach initiatives initiating from outside the Aboriginal community, as well as the belief that community members best understand the specific needs of the community, early outreach initiatives should be led by the target community.⁴⁹

While students believe that communities should have a direct role in outreach initiatives, it is recognized that in many cases, Aboriginal communities lack sufficient resources to fund educational outreach initiatives. Consequently, while community members may be strongly motivated to improve educational outcomes for their youth, they may be unable to implement outreach programs. Additionally, many types of outreach programs are expensive, particularly those that involve travel from remote communities to post-secondary institutions.⁵⁰ As a result, students believe the provincial and federal governments should provide financial and other support for Aboriginal outreach programs, while ensuring that control and management of these initiatives is with Aboriginal communities.

Concerns

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

It has been well documented that Aboriginal students are inadequately supported in the primary and secondary school system, both at on-reserve and off-reserve schools. The

⁴⁶ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). *When did you decide?* L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

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

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising practices: increasing and supporting participation for Aboriginal students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Chiefs of Ontario note that, “many First Nations students struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills and for many, post-secondary education remains a dream.”⁵¹ The percentage of Aboriginal people who have not completed high school is 35 per cent, more than double that of the non-Aboriginal population (15 per cent).⁵² Historically, Aboriginal schools, including industrial, day and residential schools, were poorly funded and held to poor educational standards, and problems persist to the present day.⁵³ Schools located in rural and remote Aboriginal communities often lack basic resources and inadequate funding has been a challenge in raising the standard of Aboriginal education in Ontario.⁵⁴ Witnesses before the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples reported that on-reserve schools are often unable to offer competitive salaries, often paying up to 30 per cent less than provincially funded schools. This was believed to contribute to a particularly high turnover of teaching staff, with one witness reported “Last year 30 per cent of the teachers left us as did 50 per cent of the principals.”⁵⁵ Others have argued that students would be more motivated to attend and excel at school if funds were available to replace out-dated textbooks and invest in new equipment.⁵⁶

Inadequate preparation not only leaves students lacking the hard skills necessary for success in a university environment; it also impacts student confidence and motivation. A report by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada found that a weak foundation in primary and secondary school was part of the reason Aboriginal students were underrepresented at the post-secondary level.⁵⁷ Several studies note that Aboriginal students are concerned about their academic preparation, and consequently less confident about their abilities and less likely to apply to post-secondary institutions, particularly university.⁵⁸ A high teacher turn-over rate and lack of resources in on-reserve schools, as well as poor transition programs for students transferring from on-reserve to off-reserve schooling, all erode the quality of education Aboriginal students receive.

Concern Five: Band schools are frequently under-funded in comparison to the funding made available to schools funded through the provincial system.

Unlike public schools, band schools are funded by the federal government, and do not receive the same amount, or types of funding. Members of Aboriginal communities have identified underfunding as the biggest barrier to providing high-quality education to students at band schools.⁵⁹ Further, the funding model for band schools has not been updated in almost twenty years, which has lead it to be outdated and ineffective. The increase expenditure cap of 2 per cent has not been substantive enough to keep up with the true cost increases if running and operating the schools.

⁵¹ Chabot, Lise. (2005). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁵² Gordon & White (2013) *Supply side of Aboriginal Education in Post-Secondary Education*

⁵³ Carr-Stewart, Sheila. (2006). The changing educational governance of First Nations schools in Canada: towards local control and educational equity. *Management in Education*: 20 (5), 6-12.

⁵⁴ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁵ Gerry St. Germain and Lilly Eva Dyck (2011) *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*. Ottawa: Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples

⁵⁶ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Report from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2011) *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*.

A comparison undertaken by the Chiefs of Ontario found that band schools received approximately 60 per cent through the Band Operated Funding Formula of the per-student funding that students in the provincial system received.⁶⁰ Part of this discrepancy stems from a 2 per cent annual cap on federal funding for primary and secondary education that has been in place since 1996. This discrepancy in funding is particularly troubling given the rapidly increasing population of Aboriginal youth: in 2011 National Chief Shawn Atleo estimated that 6.3 per cent annual increases would have been required in order to simply “keep up” with the cost of education.⁶¹ Federal funding, then, has not kept pace with the increasing costs of providing a quality education at the primary and secondary levels.

Further, while the provincial government provides funding for libraries, computers and software, teaching training, principals, extracurricular and special education, and other units and support services, the federal government does not.⁶² Due to this, band schools struggle to provide these integral support and education enhancement services that have become staples in provincial schools. On top of this, many of the band schools face infrastructure issues, such as limited or no internet connections, unsafe drinking water and mould throughout the buildings.⁶³ In 2009 the Parliamentary Budget Officer reported found that only 49 per cent of First Nations schools were deemed in good condition.⁶⁴ From this, it is clear that not only are the students who attend band schools receiving less support services, but the institutions which they attend may not even be physically safe.

The results of the underfunding of band schools can be seen clearly in the educational outcomes for students who attend them. The Auditor General of Ontario⁶⁵ noted that the limited per-student funding of on-reserve schools leaves students who later transfer into the public system ‘several grade levels behind’. The Education Quality and Accountability Office found that only half of on-reserve students attending provincially funded schools passed the Grade 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in the 2010/11 school year, compared to the provincial average of 83 per cent.⁶⁶ Several reports comment that band schools receive as much as \$2000^{67, 68} less per student per year than provincially funded schools and that this is clearly seen in the educational outcome differences for students in the institutions. Further, this has created difficulty in maintaining and recruiting quality teachers and staff.

⁶⁰ Claudine VanEvery-Albert, *A Review of the Band Operated Funding Formula*. Available online: <http://www.chiefs-of-ontario.org/sites/default/files/files/A%20Review%20of%20the%20Band%20Operated%20Funding%20Formula.pdf>

⁶¹ Report from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2011) *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*. Available online: http://www.trcm.ca/PDF/Sentate_Standing_Committee_on_FN_Education.pdf

⁶² First Nations Family and Caring Society of Canada (2010) *First Nations Education Information Sheet*. Ottawa: FN Caring Society. Available online: <http://www.fncaringociety.ca/sites/default/files/FN-Education-Info-Sheet.pdf>

⁶³ Report from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2011) *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*

⁶⁴ First Nations Family and Caring Society of Canada (2011) *Jordan and Shannen: First Nations Children demand that the Canadian Government Stop Discriminating Against them*. Ottawa: 2011. Available online: http://www.fncaringociety.ca/sites/default/files/Canada_FNCCaringSocietyofCanada_CRC61.pdf

⁶⁵ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario.

⁶⁶ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools*. Toronto: People for Education

⁶⁷ Report from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2011) *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*

⁶⁸ First Nations Family and Caring Society of Canada (2011) *Jordan and Shannen: First Nations Children demand that the Canadian Government Stop Discriminating Against them*. Ottawa: 2011.

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

Many schools in Aboriginal communities lack the necessary support systems. Teachers often have to deal with a variety of personal and situational factors, along with pressure to improve student performance, which can lead to teacher fatigue and inadequate resources to accommodate post-secondary education counselling.⁶⁹ In some Aboriginal communities, close to half the students are deemed to be at risk, and teachers and other staff feel they do not have sufficient time to mentor these students.⁷⁰ In managing day-to-day issues, guidance on personal strengths, post-secondary career pathways, and educational funding options inevitably get pushed to the backburner.

Evidence demonstrates that parents play a strong role in the post-secondary aspirations of their children; youth whose parents value education are more likely to attend post-secondary education and persist through their studies.⁷¹ Consequently the lack of trust and communication between Aboriginal parents and school staff can undermine the ability of parents and teachers to provide positive motivational and informational support for students considering studying at a post-secondary institution.

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

While much of the discussion of Aboriginal students focuses on those living in rural and remote communities, it is important to remember that only a minority of Aboriginal students attend reserve schools and over half of the Aboriginal population in Ontario lives in cities.⁷² Like many Aboriginal students in rural and reserve settings, urban Aboriginal students face socio-economic barriers to participation. The average after tax income of Aboriginal Ontarians is \$28,530; over \$6,700 lower than the average income for the total population.⁷³ Additionally, Aboriginal peoples are more likely to live in low-income families: 21.9 per cent of Aboriginal Ontarians are classified as low income, compared to 13.9 per cent of the total population.⁷⁴ In the context of rising tuition, this can exacerbate financial barriers in access to higher education. Urban Aboriginal students tend to attend schools in low-income areas, which have higher drop-out rates and fewer students that continue onto post-secondary studies.⁷⁵

The urban Aboriginal community is also more dispersed than the reserve community. Consequently, community support focused on Aboriginal youth may be less readily

⁶⁹ Wotherspoon, Terry. (2008). Teachers' work intensification and educational contradictions in aboriginal communities. *Canadian Review of Sociology*. 45(4): 389-419.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Shaienks, Danielle, Tomasz Gluszynski, and Justin Bayard. (2009). Postsecondary education participation and dropping out; differences across university, college and other types of post-secondary institutions. Ottawa: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics.

⁷² Peters, E. (2007). First Nations and Métis people and diversity in Canadian cities. In Keith Banting, T.J. Courchene, and F.L. Seidle (Eds.), *Volume III Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada* (pp. 207-246). Montreal, QB: The Institute for Research on Public Policy.

⁷³ Statistics Canada (2011) *National Household Survey*. Selected demographic, cultural, labour force, educational and income characteristics. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Sweet, R., Anisef, P., Walters, D. and Phythian, K. (2010). *Post-high school pathways of immigrant youth*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

available, and the educational curriculum in primary and secondary schools may be less inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives.

It should be noted that every school board in the province has at least some Aboriginal students⁷⁶: it is therefore crucial that Aboriginal perspectives be incorporated across the province. This is, indeed, the stated aim of the Ministry of Education, who in 2007 announced their commitment to:

- Significantly improve achievement among First Nations, Inuit and Métis students;
- Close the student achievement gap between Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal students; and
- Provide all students with an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures.⁷⁷

However, in a 2012 review of the framework by the Auditor General of Ontario, concerns included:

- Performance measures set by the Ministry do not include quantitative metrics, hindering the ability to measure progress. Further the ministry does not require school boards to individually evaluate and report on their progress on these performance measures;
- A lack of baseline for measuring the educational gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students;
- Lack of any systemic vision for change, as school boards were left to implement the strategy leading to a variety of emphasis given to the priorities of the framework in different areas of the province.⁷⁸

In addition, there is concern that students from outside the dominant culture are more likely to have difficulties in the mainstream education system. Aboriginal students are over-represented in applied courses: 59 per cent of First Nations and Métis students are enrolled in applied courses, compared to a provincial average of 30 per cent,⁷⁹ while analysis of grade 10 credit accumulation data indicated that only 45 per cent of self-identified Aboriginal students were on track to graduate high school, compared to a provincial average of 74 per cent.⁸⁰ The lack of culturally relevant courses available in urban schools, combined with socio-economic marginalization, can lead to lowered student confidence and student engagement making students less likely to complete high school and enter post-secondary education.

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

Despite a recent emphasis on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the Ontario primary and secondary school curriculum, there is concern that Aboriginal perspectives

⁷⁶ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools*. Toronto: People for Education

⁷⁷ Ministry of Education (2007) *Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario

⁷⁸ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario

⁷⁹ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools*. Toronto: People for Education.

⁸⁰ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario

are still marginalized in the education system. The K-12 curriculum includes both mandatory and optional courses on First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories and culture. However, in a recent survey it was found that 51 per cent of elementary schools and 41 per cent of secondary schools offered no Aboriginal educational opportunities outside of the core curriculum.⁸¹ In comments, a number of schools indicated they were not providing enhanced native studies curricula because there were “no need in our area” or that there were “no students of Aboriginal heritage”:⁸² this clearly misses the point that learning about Aboriginal cultures and histories is important for all students.

Further, many Aboriginal groups believe that the contemporary primary, secondary and post-secondary education systems do not include indigenous knowledge on equitable footing alongside Euro-Canadian knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is presented at the bottom of a hierarchy that privileges European knowledge, and that it is treated as belonging only to a cultural realm, and not substantively integrated into other areas of the curriculum like sciences or literature.⁸³ In one focus group, a student told OUSA: “I went to an off-reserve public school in high school and the only mention of anything Indigenous that I can remember was we watched one video on residential schools, just one in all of my school experience, and we discussed the Oka Crisis, but it was discussed very negatively...”⁸⁴

Clearly, the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge into primary and secondary school curriculum is often seen as a secondary initiative in the face of more pressing daily concerns, like meeting curriculum requirements and preparing students for province-wide testing. Finally, when some Aboriginal content does manage to make it into the classroom, rarely does it include Métis perspectives and issues.

The inability of provincially-funded schools to adequately incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum at all levels of education risks further alienating Aboriginal parents and students from the education system. Additionally, a lack of culturally relevant learning resources may negatively affect student motivation, persistence and engagement, reducing the likelihood that Aboriginal students will persevere through secondary school and enrol in post-secondary education.

Concern Nine: Aboriginal students are not always provided with enough high quality, culturally appropriate advice from their teachers/guidance counsellors on the post-secondary pathways available to them.

Students are concerned that inadequate resources may be available for Aboriginal students when they are making choices about their post-secondary pathways. A People for Education survey found that 41 per cent of secondary schools in Ontario offer no Aboriginal education opportunities (for example, through professional development),⁸⁵ which suggests that teachers may be ill-prepared to deal with the complex social, economic and historical barriers their Aboriginal students may face. In a focus group held at Queen’s University, one student recounted how she had supported family and friends when they came to apply for university, and that there hadn’t been any support

⁸¹ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools*. Toronto: People for Education.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Auditor General of Ontario (2012) *Education of Aboriginal Students (c.3.05)* Toronto: Government of Ontario

⁸⁴ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Queen’s University, January 15 2014

⁸⁵ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools* Toronto: People for Education

or information from teachers about the particular importance of self-identifying as Aboriginal (in order to receive scholarships/consideration under Aboriginal admissions policies).⁸⁶

Further, this study found that in elementary schools with 7.5 per cent or more of the student population identified as Aboriginal⁸⁷ only 10 per cent had guidance counselors⁸⁸; while equivalent data is not available for high schools, this highlights the resource gaps which exist for schools with high proportions of Aboriginal learners. This is also troubling as evidence suggests that earlier education can have significant impacts on future pathways.

Compounding the lack of resources for post-secondary guidance is the lack of communication that has been documented between school staff and Aboriginal parents. Research has indicated that Aboriginal parents may face a range of barriers in engaging with their children's education including: being unfamiliar or intimidated by the education system, considering the formal education system the realm of professionals, ambivalence towards the school as an institution, and discouragement by teachers.⁸⁹ Similar concerns have been reported in Ontario, where Aboriginal parents may experience racism, and apathetic teachers when they try to become more involved in the education system.⁹⁰

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

At the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, there is a shortage of qualified instructors available to teach Aboriginal content in Aboriginal courses. This was a common concern raised by Aboriginal students at many of our member campuses. This often results in Aboriginal content being taught by non-Aboriginal instructors who may not have a clear understanding of the context surrounding issues, or may present information inaccurately or incompletely.⁹¹ Often there are qualified Aboriginal individuals available to teach language or cultural courses, but these individuals' expertise may be unrecognized by the formal accreditation system, and consequently they are not recognized as able teachers.⁹² At other times, students themselves, even in primary school, may be called upon to provide "the Aboriginal perspective."⁹³ This is problematic for a number of reasons. Students are not meant to be teachers, they are not experts, and may be still learning or struggling to find out more about their Aboriginal identity. Assuming that an Aboriginal student, who is from a particular culture and a particular geographic location, can comment on all things Aboriginal is grossly unfair and tokenistic. Moreover, asking a student to stand up in a class and present "the Aboriginal perspective" places a great deal of pressure on them, singles them out from

⁸⁶ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Queen's University, January 15 2014

⁸⁷ 7.5 per cent is the threshold at which the provincial government provides additional funding in recognition that the school has a larger proportion of Aboriginal students.

⁸⁸ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools* Toronto: People for Education

⁸⁹ Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (2010) *Staying in School: Engaging Aboriginal Students* Ottawa: Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

⁹⁰ Chabot, Lise. (2005). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁹¹ McMaster First Nations Student Association Focus Group, Nov. 1st, 2011.

⁹² Meeting with Julia Candlish, June 2011.

⁹³ Aboriginal focus group at Waterloo. Oct 19th, 2011.

the class, and leaves them to singlehandedly combat stereotypes and racism in what may not be a comfortable environment.

Recommendations

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

The provincial and federal governments must work together with Aboriginal communities to improve the primary and secondary education systems available to Aboriginal students. As the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning declares, “one component of Aboriginal education should not be given precedence over others.... government involvement in First Nations and Aboriginal post-secondary education should not be an either/or matter.”⁹⁴ Only with adequate funding from the primary through to post-secondary level can Aboriginal students be given the support they need to develop their own talents and pursue the post-secondary pathways of their choice.

The federal government should work to ensure that on-reserve schools are funded at a level that meets local needs and prepare students to enter post-secondary education.⁹⁵ The current funding system where Aboriginal schools are funded at approximately 60 per cent the per-student rate of provincial schools is unsustainable.⁹⁶ The lack of funding must be rectified to ensure that all Aboriginal students have access to a high quality primary and secondary education, and that sufficient support is available for the development of culturally relevant curricula.

The provincial government should ensure that adequate resources are available to the 82 per cent of Aboriginal students that attend provincially funded schools.⁹⁷ Funding for the development and implementation of culturally relevant programming in all aspects of education should be prioritized. While there have been some positive steps, such as the creation of a new textbook for a Grade 10 Native Studies course and a lower student-to-teacher threshold for Native Studies courses, much more needs to be done. Many primary and secondary schools require more resources to hire and train teachers in Native Studies, and implement Aboriginal curriculum.⁹⁸ It is important to note that Native Studies curriculum in provincial schools benefits non-Aboriginal students as well, by exposing them to a diverse curriculum and combating racism and stereotypes.⁹⁹

Steps to improve the public education system for Aboriginal students should also include expanding provincial funding for Aboriginal support services in primary and secondary schools. Support services should vary with the needs of specific communities but include: home-school liaison activities, a safe space, orientation activities, guidance counselling, academic support services, cultural activities, visits by Elders, and transition

⁹⁴ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ VanEvery-Albert, Claudine, *A Review of the Band Operated Funding Formula*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁹⁷ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools* Toronto: People for Education

⁹⁸ Faries, Emily. (2004). Research Paper on Aboriginal Curriculum in Ontario. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

support.¹⁰⁰ While initiatives often focus on remedial efforts with Aboriginal students who have fallen the furthest behind, in order to develop student motivation and confidences, primary and secondary education should also focus on giving each student the opportunity to develop and share their unique abilities.¹⁰¹

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

Part of ensuring that Aboriginal students are not marginalized at the primary and secondary level, particularly for the majority who attend non-band schools where they are largely out-numbered by non-Aboriginal students, is making sure that Aboriginal course content is taught not just as an Aboriginal issue, but as a subject that affects all people living in Canada. This reflects an understanding of Aboriginal issues as inseparable from the broader Canadian context. Taking steps to ensure that all students understand Aboriginal issues as relevant to of the past, present and future of Canada is part of combating racism, promoting understanding, and fostering an environment where Aboriginal students feel welcome and appreciated. Aboriginal content should be integrated into the Ontario curriculum at the primary and secondary level. Too often Aboriginal content is limited to historic, romantic, and static understandings of Aboriginal peoples, and perpetuates stereotypes about Aboriginal authenticity that do not help promote true understanding of the complexity and richness of Aboriginal identity. The integration of Aboriginal content should include information about current topics including treaty rights. Additionally, Métis perspectives are distinct but are currently even more underrepresented in the curriculum. The way in which Aboriginal content is integrated into the curriculum would vary between the primary and secondary level to reflect differing levels of student development, but in either case should go beyond an understanding of Aboriginal culture as purely historical and include integrated knowledge in various disciplines.

People for Education offer the following types of learning as best practices in incorporating Aboriginal perspectives:¹⁰²

- Character education;
- Talking and literature circles;
- Restorative justice initiatives;
- Using culturally responsive resources;
- Becoming involved in projects such as Shannen's Dream;¹⁰³
- Organizing extra-curricular programming;
- Organizing events and visits;
- Engaging with parents.

¹⁰⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2002). Parent and education engagement partnership project: a discussion paper. British Columbia: Project Advisory Committee.

¹⁰¹ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (eds), Mentoring for talent development (pp. 178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

¹⁰² People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools* Toronto: People for Education

¹⁰³ <http://www.fncaringsociety.ca/shannens-dream>

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

Early outreach programs in Aboriginal communities have had some success in improving secondary school graduation rates and increasing the proportion of students who enter post-secondary education. Student mentoring and other initiatives have the potential to help youth maximize their achievement and personal development.¹⁰⁴ However, evidence strongly indicates that unless program design and delivery is “responsive to the specific needs and capacities of diverse communities,” programs will have little success.¹⁰⁵

While the specific components of a successful early outreach program will vary with setting, all of them require multiple supports to address complex, interrelated barriers to post-secondary education, along with community support. The best outreach programs have multiple supports intended to recognize abilities, build on cultural dynamics, and expand existing support systems.¹⁰⁶ Successful outreach programs also are flexible in responding to the needs of their target community. For example, the Northern Lights project in Manitoba targeted at Aboriginal secondary school students, found that despite their best planning attempts, challenges encountered during the first year of the program required adjustment to expectations. The mentorship component of the program was strengthened, and more emphasis was placed on cultural heritage and identity.¹⁰⁷ The program defines success in broad terms as students returning to school, entering post-secondary education, or entering the workforce.¹⁰⁸

However, outreach programs can be expensive and communities often lack the resources to fund them. The provincial and federal governments should commit to increasing the resources available in Aboriginal communities to support early outreach programs, including the expansion of Pathways to Education Canada where appropriate. Support could be provided through multi-year funding grants to promising programs in communities of need.

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

One mechanism that has had some success in raising Aboriginal post-secondary enrolment has been outreach partnerships between Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions. Partnerships between communities and post-secondary institutions expose students to higher education possibilities at a younger age and provide them with concrete experience in a post-secondary environment.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No higher priority Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

¹⁰⁶ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (eds.), *Mentoring for talent development* (pp. 178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ McCluskey, K.W. and Torrance, E.P. (2004). Mentoring: One Pathway to Aboriginal Talent Development. In K. W. McCluskey and A. M. Mays (Eds.), *Mentoring for talent development* (178-195). Sioux Falls, SD: Reclaiming Youth International, Augustana College.

In OUSA's consultations with Aboriginal Student Centre staff at institutions across the province, we heard examples of many promising early outreach programs. These included:

- The "Mini-University program at Western University, which brings learners aged 12-16 to campus for a one week session, helping to familiarize them with the campus and providing mentorship from current Western students;
- A range of activities at Wilfrid Laurier University, including a Lacrosse Day with Six Nations youth, art projects in local high schools, and targeted initiatives for grades 7 and 8;
- A "post-secondary readiness week" hosted at Trent University, aimed at youth in Grades 11 and 12;
- A range of initiatives at Queen's University, including mentorship programs where youth are partnered with Aboriginal students currently completing degrees and the 'Aboriginal University Experience Program' which bring youth to campus to experience living and learning at Queen's.

Ontario colleges and universities can also now obtain a list of students who voluntarily identified as Aboriginal but left their applications incomplete or were not accepted through the Ontario University Application Centre and the Ontario College Application Service.¹⁰⁹ Some institutions already use this information to contact applicants and let them know about their student support programs and other options at their institutions.¹¹⁰ This information could be used more broadly to specifically target outreach efforts to students that have already shown motivation to enter post-secondary studies, but were unable to enrol for a variety of reasons. For example, Ryerson University uses a "second look" approach, whereby applicants who fail to gain entry to a program, but are considered possible candidates for other courses offered by the university, are contacted by admissions staff to help them review their application, and are offered a second chance to apply.¹¹¹

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

Recommendation Six: Early outreach programs should be within the control of Aboriginal communities, and tailored to each community's specific needs

OUSA believes that the involvement of Aboriginal community members and leaders is crucial to ensuring the success of early outreach initiatives that build upon the work already being done in the community. Aboriginal community members should be actively involved in the development, delivery, and evaluation of such programs. Early Outreach programs should additionally be provided with appropriate resources, whether these are financial, personnel or best practices.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Meeting with Aboriginal Education branch, MTCU, February 4 2014

It is also vital that programming be responsive to the specific needs of a community. One example of this is the Pathways to Education Canada program: as the program has expanded from its original Toronto location to urban Aboriginal communities in Winnipeg and Kingston, it has adapted its offerings. The core program, providing multiple supports – financial, academic and motivational – remains, but in ways modified to consider the needs of the community the program is operating in. For example, when the Winnipeg program began it adjusted its student-to-support worker ratio and offered a free evening meal: two strategies to combat concerns that the drop-out rate would be higher because Aboriginal families often feel unwelcome in the local school system.¹¹²

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

The government should investigate strategies for ensuring that school boards have adequate resources available to hire Aboriginal teachers, and to offer more Native Studies courses and Aboriginal content to all elementary and secondary school students. In addition, the government should investigate whether alternative accreditation mechanisms are feasible for certain courses, like Aboriginal language courses, and strategy to increase the recruitment and retention of qualified Aboriginal teachers. These could include offering teaching accreditation at Aboriginal education institutions, offering accreditations as a distance education course, and letting community metrics act as a stand-in for formal accreditation in specific circumstances. One example of an education program that seeks to strengthen Aboriginal teacher training is Queen's University's Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. Through the community-based stream of this program, teacher candidates are able to take courses that are adapted to local contexts and needs, and include local management committees that include elders, provides distance-learning options, and encourages collaborative decision-making.¹¹³

Recommendation Eight: Ontario's teachers should be required to complete a module on Aboriginal education as part of their training, and school boards should ensure that professional development opportunities on Aboriginal issues are made available.

Ontario's schools currently lack the capacity to effectively handle Aboriginal issues, with limited numbers of indigenous teaching staff and a lack of training for non-indigenous teacher candidates. People for Education identify that: "The most significant challenge confronting those working within teacher education programs is the prevailing and deeply embedded belief that Aboriginal education is only important for those teacher candidates who intend to work within reserve communities:" given that every school board within Ontario has Aboriginal students, this is clearly of concern.¹¹⁴ It is not currently required that teacher candidates study Aboriginal education, history or culture,

¹¹² Hammer, Kate. (Feb. 19th, 2011). Model after-school program gambles big in Winnipeg. Globe and Mail. Accessed at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/model-after-school-program-gambles-big-in-winnipeg/article1913853/page2/>

¹¹³ Rosenbluth, Ellen Kachuck (2011) *Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education: Building on Best Practices*. Kingston, Queen's University. Available online: <http://www.cou.on.ca/policy-advocacy/policy---advocacy-pdfs/indigenous-issues-in-post-secondary-education---co>

¹¹⁴ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming Gaps in Provincially Funded Schools*. Toronto: People for Education.

and only 6 out of 13 education faculties¹¹⁵ offer Aboriginal education programs. Further, only 1 of 3 schools offer professional development on Aboriginal issues for current teachers.¹¹⁶

Currently, in order to become a member in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers, a teaching candidate must undertake a full-time one-year (or equivalent) at an academic institution that includes:

- 40% of instruction focused on teaching methods;
- 20% of education foundations (the history, philosophy and psychology of education);
- 20% in other areas of education.¹¹⁷

In order to address the lack of capacity in Aboriginal education, OUSA recommends that the provincial government mandate that teacher candidates should additionally be required to complete a compulsory module on Aboriginal education as part of their training. As teacher education moves from a one year to a two-year program in 2015, the province has a unique opportunity to address Aboriginal education in teacher training programs. The provincial government should also encourage school boards to offer professional development opportunities regarding Aboriginal issues for existing teaching staff. These modules and professional development opportunities should be institutionally designed in order to meet local priorities and interest, and, institutions should ensure that Aboriginal Education Councils should be involved and consulted in the development of these courses.

<p><i>Recommendation Nine: Guidance counsellors should receive regular skills updating on concerns pertaining to Aboriginal students.</i></p>
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Given the unique barriers that Aboriginal students may face in accessing post-secondary education, it is vital that school guidance counsellors are well equipped to support vulnerable Aboriginal youth in completing high school and considering their transitions to PSE. Guidance counselors play a key role in ensuring that students are aware of all of their options within PSE. The Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) is an organization of First Nations education counsellors, and have developed resources for counsellors supporting young people transitioning through their education.

ONECA identifies the following best practices for education counsellors when supporting high school to PSE transitions:

- Excursions to post-secondary institutions that are live or web-based;
- Attend cultural, social and academic events at colleges and universities;
- Meet the staff and orientate to services at the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Units at colleges/universities;
- Parental and community involvement with transition events (Grade 12 graduation);

¹¹⁵ Brock, Lakehead, Nippissing, Ottawa and York.

¹¹⁶ People for Education (2013) *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming Gaps in Provincially Funded Schools*

¹¹⁷ Ontario College of Teachers (2013) Registration Guide: Requirements for becoming a general education teacher in Ontario. Toronto: Ontario College of Teachers

- Develop a career pathway plan for students that involves the secondary guidance department and potential post-secondary institutions;
- Offer workshops on bursaries and scholarships available to First Nations, Métis and Inuit students;
- Host an application for post-secondary funds/sponsorship session to First Nations, Métis and Inuit students;
- Academic skills, resources, training and services;
- Research and familiarity with programs and services available to First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in the city or town or location of school;
- Personalized tours of college/university that identifies students location of classes, cafeteria, library and other essential services;
- Mentorship and buddy programs that link students to a support network.¹¹⁸

Guidance counsellors should have the training and knowledge to be able to provide these services to Aboriginal students. As well as general core content, guidance counsellors should seek to be responsive to the specific contexts of their students, for example, through familiarizing themselves with the funding structures of local bands.

Financial Supports

Principles

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

Aboriginal students often face severe financial barriers to pursuing post-secondary studies. Many live in remote or rural communities and must move away from their home community to attend a post-secondary institution, incurring additional costs associated with residence and travel.¹¹⁹ In addition, the average income of Aboriginal people in Ontario falls significantly below the Ontario median, and Aboriginal people have higher unemployment rates than non-Aboriginals in Ontario.¹²⁰ All of these factors impact the ability to pay for higher education, on an individual, familial and community basis.

All willing and qualified students should have the opportunity to attend post-secondary education; financial circumstances should not be a barrier to anyone in pursuit of a higher education. Both the federal and provincial governments have a responsibility to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent otherwise qualified Aboriginal students from embarking on post-secondary studies. This responsibility stems from some interpretations of treaty agreements with First Nations and also from the importance of creating an equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to benefit from a higher education. The federal government has recognized this obligation through

¹¹⁸ ONECA (2012) *Information for Education Counsellors*. Available online: <http://www.oneca.com/transitions/education-counsellors.html>

¹¹⁹ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, Miriam Kramer and Andrew Wismer. (2010). *Aboriginals in post-secondary education*. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

¹²⁰ Wilson, D. Macdonald, D (2010) *The Income Gap Between Aboriginal Peoples and the Rest of Canada*. Toronto: The Centre for Policy Alternatives.

programs designed to increase the participation and success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education, including the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEP).¹²¹ Similarly, the Ontario government's Access to Opportunities Strategy is specifically targeted at raising Aboriginal post-secondary participation rates, and offers bursary program for Aboriginal students.¹²² Through these programs, government has recognized the unique financial barriers that face Aboriginal students and articulated its responsibility for helping Aboriginal students overcome these barriers and access higher education at comparable rates to non-Aboriginal Ontarians.

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

Evidence suggests that all groups of Aboriginal students – status First Nations, non-status First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – face financial barriers to post-secondary studies, including lower family incomes, the need to travel large distances to access post-secondary education, and often debt aversion.¹²³ Nevertheless, many federal funding programs restrict eligibility to status First Nations and Inuit students. In contrast, most provincial programs are available to any individual who self-identifies as Aboriginal and provides supporting documentation. Students believe that all Aboriginal students should be able to access financial assistance that enables them to adequately meet their financial need to access post-secondary education. The federal government's responsibility for Aboriginal post-secondary education is often perceived as a direct result of treaties with status First Nations, and specific arrangements with Inuit communities. While these unique obligations are important and should be affirmed and continued, students believe that all Aboriginal students with financial need, regardless of status or geographic location, should be able to access adequate funding for their post-secondary education.¹²⁴

Principle Eleven: The increased costs associated with studying at a greater distance from home should not act as an undue barrier for Aboriginal students.

The distance from a student's home to the nearest university has a major impact on their likelihood to attend university. Students who live more than 80 km away from a university are 42 per cent less likely to attend than students who live within 40 km of a university.¹²⁵ Given that universities tend to be located in urban centers while Aboriginal students are more likely to be from rural communities than non-Aboriginals (74.7 per cent compared to 52.9 per cent respectively), distance has the potential to create barriers to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2010). "University College Entrance Preparation Program". Accessed at: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/edu/ep/pse2-eng.asp>

¹²² Ontario Ministry of Education. (Feb. 2009). "Aboriginal Education in Ontario". Toronto: Government of Ontario.

¹²³ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ ¹²⁵ Marc Frenette. *Too Far to Go On? Distance to School and University Participation*. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2002, pg. 20).

¹²⁶ Finnie, et al (2010) *Aboriginals in post-secondary education*. Toronto: MESA Projects

In focus groups conducted by OUSA, students highlighted the importance of traveling home frequently, especially given cultural distrust stemming from the experience of residential schools.¹²⁷ While travelling home may be important to all students to access support networks, the fact that Aboriginal students are more likely to come from rural backgrounds means they must bear additional costs to do so. The financial assistance system should allow students to travel home on a regular basis; thereby ensuring post-secondary education is accessible to all students.

Principle Twelve: Information on financial aid available to Aboriginal students should be clearly accessible and easy to understand by students.

Despite large investments by the provincial government to improve Ontario's financial assistance system, financial barriers are often the most cited reason students do not attend post-secondary education. Nearly as likely is a lack of knowledge about the costs, benefits and financial assistance options available. Given that Aboriginal students have to contend with an additional level of complexity, band funding, information must be provided that clearly defines the different financial assistance options available to students. Further to this point, Aboriginal learners tend to overestimate the costs and underestimate the benefits of post-secondary education to a greater degree than their peers.¹²⁸ These informational resources should differentiate between repayable and non-repayable forms of assistance and be tailored to the needs of each band, allowing band funding policies to be integrated into materials.

Principle Thirteen: The administration of financial assistance targeted at Aboriginal students (such as the provincial Aboriginal Bursary fund) must be transparent, easy to understand and accessible to students with need.

Financial assistance programs must be transparent and easily accessible for students. This means that information and resources must be available for students where they are likely to find them and processes and criteria for applications must be clearly delineated. Aboriginal Student Centres and their staff should be considered the primary point of contact for students, although the same information must be available through all conventional financial assistance/awards channels at the university. Furthermore, application processes and criteria for receiving a grant from the bursary must be clear, publicized, and not overly cumbersome. University student support staff should also be available to assist students in completing the application process.

Concerns

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

Aboriginal students often face significant challenges in financing post-secondary education, including low family incomes, additional travel costs, debt aversion, and price sensitivity.¹²⁹ In 2011, the median after-tax income of status First Nations people –

¹²⁷ OUSA Aboriginal Student Focus Groups, 2014

¹²⁸ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2008) *Factors Affecting the Use of Student Financial Assistance by First Nations Youth*. Ottawa: CMSF.

¹²⁹ Debt aversion refers to a reluctance to enter into debt to finance post-secondary education, while price sensitivity refers to how the post-secondary participation rate of a group or individual is affected more by increases and decreases in the gross cost of education.

\$22,373¹³⁰ – lower than the combined estimated cost of living, tuition and fees in Ontario of \$27,192.¹³¹ Roughly half of all Aboriginal people in Ontario live in rural or northern communities. These individuals face additional financial challenges in financing their post-secondary educations. Unlike their urban counterparts, Aboriginal students from rural and northern communities usually do not have the option of reducing their post-secondary expenses by living at home while attending university. Students living away from home while attending university in Ontario incur an average of \$7,100 to \$10,300 in additional expenses, depending on the location of their institution.¹³² In addition, students from rural or northern home communities often face significant travel costs for travel between their home community and post-secondary institution. While the Ontario Distance Grant provides a maximum of \$300 per year to OSAP-eligible students whose parents live over 80 kilometres from a post-secondary institution for travel expenses, this amount is often insufficient to cover even a single trip home for students from remote areas.¹³³

Finally, research suggests that in addition to having limited financial resources to draw on in financing a post-secondary education, Aboriginal students are often reluctant to accrue large amounts of debt to pay for tuition and other costs.¹³⁴ Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to be concerned about their ability to pay off debt post-graduation. This concern is extremely valid if they wish to return to home reserve communities post-graduation where unemployment is often high, and well-paying job opportunities are few.¹³⁵ Students may be strongly driven to use their education in their home district to contribute to community development, regardless of pay scale. Yet in a context where undergraduate tuition is rising at nearly double the rate of inflation, increasing numbers of students need to go into debt to finance their education and acquiring a well paying job-post graduation is a necessity.¹³⁶ Debt aversion and concern about post-graduation employment opportunities are significant financial barriers for Aboriginal students given that the current Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) provides the majority of its assistance in the form of a loan, and to apply for any grants under the program, students must also apply for loans.

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

The major federal programs that provide financial support to Aboriginal students are the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University College Entrance

¹³⁰ Figures based on National Household Survey (2011) for First Nations peoples in Ontario. See: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=1&LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=107647&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=95&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>

¹³¹ Figures based on data from Statistics Canada *University Tuition Fees 2011/12* and cost of living estimates for 2011, based on Student Cost of Living Study (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003), subject to the Ontario Consumer Price Index inflation to 2010 and average tuition increases of 5%

¹³² Statistics Canada. (2009). Low income cut-offs from 2008 and low income measures for 2007. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

¹³³ "Rural and Northern Focus Group" McMaster University, October 27th, 2010.

¹³⁴ Palameta, Boris and Jean-Pierre Voyer. (2010). Willingness to pay for postsecondary education among underrepresented groups. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

¹³⁵ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). First generation post-secondary education students. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

¹³⁶ Finnie, Ross, Richard Mueller, Arthur Sweetman and Alex Usher. (2009). New perspectives on access to post-secondary education. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Preparation Program (UCEP). PSSSP provides financial support to students who enrol in a post-secondary institution to assist with tuition, books, living costs, and other related expenses, while UCEP provides financial support to students enrolled in university or college preparation courses.¹³⁷ Funding for these programs has been capped at 2 per cent annual growth since 1996.¹³⁸ The cap ignores the fact that post-secondary tuition and other costs have risen at an average of well over 2 per cent per year since 1996, and between 3 and 5 per cent per year since 2005. In addition, the number of Aboriginal applicants for PSSSP funding has increased during this period. In Ontario, more than 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 27, and the Aboriginal population in Ontario under the age of 14 grew to 28 per cent by 2011.¹³⁹ The cap on funding increases for the PSSSP and UCEP means that more students are applying for less money to cover their costs. One result of this has been that despite increasing numbers of Aboriginal students studying at post-secondary institutions, the number of students receiving funding nationally through the programs has declined from 27,500 in 2000 to 22,000 over the past decade.¹⁴⁰

Another concern with the PSSSP and UCEP is that the eligibility criteria exclude many potential students who identify as Aboriginal and have financial need. In particular, non-status First Nations and Métis individuals cannot apply for assistance under the federal programs. This exclusion is concerning on several fronts. Both non-status First Nations and Métis are recognized as Aboriginal peoples under the 1982 Canada Constitution Act. Both these groups also tend to have lower post-secondary participation rates, and socioeconomic indicators demonstrating they have a need of financial support for post-secondary education. Finally, in many cases legal standing as a “status” individual is based on somewhat arbitrary criteria. For example, because status is determined by outside designation, not self-identification, if a group or family was absent when the Indian Agent was recording status, despite being Aboriginal, they would not have status under the law.¹⁴¹ Up until 1960, all status First Nations who voted in a federal election or obtained a university degree, and all women who married non-status men automatically lost status.¹⁴² Moreover, Métis individuals have never been recognized as having status, and consequently have never been eligible for funding under the federal programs, despite facing many barriers to post-secondary education directly as a result of their Aboriginal identity. Approximately 50 per cent of non-status and Métis students cite financial barriers as one of the top reasons for not completing university or college.¹⁴³ While there are a few independent programs across the country for Métis students, such as the Louis Riel Scholarship provided by the Manitoba Métis Federation, these are unable to fully meet the substantive need for funding.

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

¹³⁷ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2013). “The Post-Secondary Student Support Program”. Accessed at: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/edu/ep/pse1-eng.asp>

¹³⁸ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

¹³⁹ Statistics Canada. (2013). “National Household Survey 2011”.

¹⁴⁰ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

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

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Association of Canadian Community Colleges. (2005). Meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners. An overview of current programs and services, challenges, opportunities and lessons learned final report. Retrieved Jul 15, 2008 from http://www.accc.ca/ftp/pubs/200507_Aboriginal.pdf

Given that federal funding for post-secondary education has been capped at 2 per cent increases per year since 1996, and the number of Aboriginal students studying at post-secondary institutions has dramatically increased over the same period, it is not surprising that First Nations bands are unable to fund all students aspiring to enter higher education in a given year. Further evidencing the failure of these programs to adequately meet the need of Aboriginal learners is the fact that between 2001 and 2006, nearly 11,000 Aboriginal students could not access post-secondary education because they were denied funds through the program.¹⁴⁴ Students who are denied funding often delay enrolment, because “socio-economic conditions prevailing in the communities mean that parents are not in a position to take up the slack.”¹⁴⁵ Some students end up on waiting lists for funding for multiple years. In 2009, estimates indicated that First Nations funding requirements were at \$642 million, which was more than twice the actual budget allocated for PSSSP.¹⁴⁶

First Nations bands are being forced to make difficult choices between qualified applicants about who will receive funding for their post-secondary studies. This has led to a myriad of issues concerning the distribution of funding. Individuals living off-reserve who have status but less immediate ties to the band may face challenges in making a compelling case for funding.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, people who had lost status through the clauses of the Indian Act that discriminated against women, and later regained status through Bill C-31 in 1985, often have weak ties to bands, which may make it more difficult for them to obtain band funding.¹⁴⁸ Inevitably, given the funding shortages of the PSSSP program, band leaders must decide who does not go to post-secondary education in a given year. Virtually all First Nations have waiting lists for funding, which include individuals who have already been accepted to PSE but been forced to delay enrolment for multiple years as they wait for funding.¹⁴⁹

We have heard from Aboriginal learners that changing educational pathways, taking classes outside of a declared major or taking a break from their education, even for sound reasons, can all put their continued funding or place on the waiting list at risk. Students have concerns not only about the scarcity of funding or long waiting lists (which put students at risk of having other support or scholarships reduced), but also with the many ways in which funding in study can be precarious or insufficient.

Concern Fourteen: Approximately half of all Aboriginal students are mature students, and as such are ineligible for many provincial grant programs, such as the Ontario Tuition Grant (OTG).

¹⁴⁴ Assembly of First Nations. (2010). Taking Action for First Nations post-secondary education: access and opportunity and outcomes discussion paper. Ottawa: The First Nations Post-Secondary Education; Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel.

¹⁴⁵ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Communication Canada-Publishing, Ottawa.

¹⁴⁶ Assembly of First Nations. (2010). Taking Action for First Nations post-secondary education: access and opportunity and outcomes discussion paper. Ottawa: The First Nations Post-Secondary Education; Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel.

¹⁴⁷ Preston, J. (2008). Overcoming the Obstacles: Postsecondary Education and Aboriginal Peoples. Brock Education, 18: 57-66.

¹⁴⁸ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁴⁹ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Studies indicate that approximately 50 per cent of Aboriginal university students are mature students.¹⁵⁰ There are many reasons why Aboriginal students tend to be older than non-Aboriginal students, including:

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

A number of provincial grant programs require students to have finished secondary school within the last four years to qualify. These include the Ontario Access Grant, and the Ontario Tuition Grant (OTG), both of which are designed to help low and middle income families.

For example, in its present form, OTG is inaccessible to some Aboriginal students because it does not account for the social factors students face, as outlined above. Similarly, the median time between graduating high school and attending university is 15 months for Aboriginal students, compared to 4 months for non-Aboriginal students. This is significant because this 11-month gap reduces a student's OTG eligibility by at least one year.

There are additional informational barriers that may exist for Aboriginal students as it relates to OTG. Aboriginal learners are more likely to believe that the OTG may make them ineligible for federal financial assistance. They may also be under the impression that applying for OTG has to be done as part of applying for other forms of provincial student assistance, including loans. Aboriginal youth and would-be learners are one of several populations who report being especially debt adverse, and may be shying away from the OTG in greater numbers than the general population because of these concerns.

Consequently, a large number of Aboriginal students may be unable to access these programs. Further, much institutional aid is designed as a high school recruitment tool, and so may require direct entry from a secondary school.

Concern Fifteen: Aboriginal students from rural or northern communities may incur higher travel costs.

While Aboriginal students often wish to travel home to access support networks and attend to family or community responsibilities, they may be unable to given the high costs of doing so. As previously noted, Aboriginal students are more likely to be from rural communities than their non-Aboriginal peers (74.7 per cent compared to 52.9 per cent respectively), meaning travel will likely be more costly for these students. While

¹⁵⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

OSAP does provide a Distance Grant for students who have to travel more than 80 km to attend university, this only provides \$500 per term if living at home, or \$300 if visiting a parental home, a sum which may not be enough to cover even one trip home for students in northern communities. OUSA's Ontario Post-Secondary Survey supports this notion, as non-Aboriginal students are more likely than Aboriginal students to report that they spend less than 50 per cent of their time in their university's city¹⁵¹. As a result, Aboriginal students may be discouraged from attending or persisting through post-secondary education.

Concern Sixteen: Information on available financial assistance may not be easily accessible to all Aboriginal students.

Awareness of financial assistance options among Aboriginal youth and students is often lower than that of the general population, negatively impacting Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education. In particular, a Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF) study¹⁵² highlighted several issues pertaining to student financial assistance awareness amongst Aboriginal students and communities including a lack of knowledge around financial assistance in general and a lack of awareness surrounding band funding and its relationship to other forms of financial assistance.

Speaking to the former, the CMSF highlighted communities' general lack of awareness of student financial assistance as a barrier. Specifically, parents of Aboriginal youth are commonly seen as a source of information on student financial assistance, yet possess limited knowledge of the financial assistance system. Additionally, communities often do not differentiate between good and bad debt, potentially discouraging students from utilizing the student financial assistance system in any capacity. Finally, in northern or remote communities, support mechanisms may not exist to support students applying for SFA.

Informational barriers also exist with regard to band funding and its relationship to other forms of student financial assistance. The same CMSF study found that although students were aware of band funding, they considered it to be a provider of a majority of a student's financial assistance, creating a false expectation that it would be able to meet all of their financial needs. Further, the role played by other forms of financial assistance, including grants and loans, is often misunderstood resulting in many students not taking advantage of all available assistance.¹⁵³ Finally, differences in band policies can mean that some students are eligible to take advantage of student financial assistance opportunities outside of band funding, while others would see band funding reduced by the amount of other awards.

Concern Seventeen: The provincial Aboriginal Bursary program reaches relatively few Aboriginal students and does not have the resources to support increased student demand.

The Aboriginal Bursary is a provincial program for Aboriginal students with financial need, studying full or part-time at a college, university, or Aboriginal post-secondary institution. The details of the application process, including how much money is

¹⁵¹ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. *Ontario Student Survey*. 2013

¹⁵² Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2008) Factors Affecting the Use of Student Financial Assistance by First Nations Youth. Ottawa: CMSF

¹⁵³ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Western University, January 2014

received, who qualifies as having financial need, and any additional requirements is set by individual schools, but students generally do not have to be status-First Nations to qualify. In 2009-10, the Aboriginal Bursary was received by 741 students for an average of amount of \$1,600, while in 2012-13 just over 1,000 students received the bursary at an average award of \$1,300¹⁵⁴ Given that there are approximately 14,000 Aboriginal students enrolled in post-secondary education in Ontario, and that many of these students have substantial financial need, it is concerning that so few students received the Aboriginal Bursary.

The low number of Aboriginal Bursary recipients is likely due to both the complicated application process and the limited availability of funds. The application for the Aboriginal Bursary is not tied to the OSAP application process, as are the vast majority of provincial bursaries, but rather involves a separate application set by the individual institution. As a result, there is little consistency in application processes between institutions. In addition, a student who applies for OSAP would not necessarily know that there was also a provincially funded Aboriginal Bursary they could apply for, and students applying for the Aboriginal Bursary may not also realize that they can apply for OSAP. While in 2012/13 the Aboriginal bursary was fully disbursed, students are concerned that there have been concerns in the past that despite significant unmet financial need in the Aboriginal community: for example in 2009-10 institutions were only able to disburse 85 per cent of the Aboriginal Bursary funds.

In addition, studies have pointed to the fact that despite the increased costs of attending post-secondary education in recent years, the availability and magnitude of bursaries for Aboriginal students has not increased to meet the increased need.¹⁵⁵ In 20012-2013, a mere \$1.3 million dollars was disbursed through the Aboriginal Bursary.¹⁵⁶ The funding of the program is not based on the number of students with financial need who apply, but rather is a fixed amount per institution based on their Aboriginal student population. Consequently, applicants have no guarantee that they will receive any funding, let alone enough to meet their expenses. This contrasts with the OSAP process, where all students receive funding based on their need regardless of the demands on the provincial budget.

Aboriginal students face significant financial barriers to obtaining post-secondary education; however, government programs including PSSSP, the Access to Opportunities Strategy, and the Aboriginal Bursary have not kept pace with student demand. Additionally, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities highlighted in its “Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework,” the Aboriginal population in Ontario is poised to grow by 16 per cent by 2017 with the population aged 20-29 growing 22 per cent in this period (from 2011),¹⁵⁷ meaning the number of Aboriginal students attending Ontario universities will likely grow significantly in the coming years. As a result, governments must increase their contributions to Aboriginal student financial assistance programs simply to keep up with demographic trends; however, further contributions must be made to ensure students’ financial needs are met.

¹⁵⁴ Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2013). “Aboriginal Bursary”, accessed at: <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/TCONT003464.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. (2010). Answering the call: The 2010 inventory of Canadian university programs and services for Aboriginal students. Ottawa: AUCC.

¹⁵⁶ Ontario Student Assistance Program Data Request. 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2011) Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework. Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario.

Concern Eighteen: The Aboriginal Bursary is often administered inefficiently.

The Aboriginal Bursary has many benefits and challenges which when taken together result in a program that can be enhanced to better support students. While the bursary's flexibility allows an institution to cater to the unique needs of its students and provide a nuanced assessment of student need, the lack of a standardized approach may lead to an inefficient and non-optimal use of resources. Given institutional autonomy over allocation of resources, there is no guarantee that the criteria used to assess student need are progressive in nature. Further, the bursary (or criteria for applying) may not be publicized by the institution or it may not be used as a grant, rather as a pool for emergency loans or work-study programs. As a result, students may not be aware that the bursary exists (leading to under-utilization) or may be unaware of how to obtain funding through it.

In addition to the previously noted concerns, OUSA's consultations with Aboriginal Student Centres at Ontario universities demonstrated that logistical issues have also created barriers to fully utilizing the bursary. Specifically, informational barriers make it difficult for staff to track the availability of funds or how funds have been utilized. Institutions must better coordinate to ensure the Aboriginal Bursary is used effectively and money is allocated efficiently.

OUSA is also concerned with the differing levels engagement undertaken with Aboriginal Education Councils in the distribution of the bursary. AECs are governing and advising bodies that have to be in place at an Ontario university in order for that university to receive public funds in support of Aboriginal education. These groups are empowered to varying degrees in advising institutional governance and administrators on Aboriginal education, and experience different reporting relationships, compositions and activity. As a result, there can be varying levels of engagement around the use of public funds, including the Aboriginal Bursary. This might mean that members of the Council, who might be best equipped to advise or oversee the distribution of such funds, or who might otherwise be able to assist in its effective disbursement, are not in a position to do so.

Concern Nineteen: Variability in band policies and allocation timelines may lead to students paying tuition late.

Through OUSA's consultations with students it was indicated that bands' variability in policies can lead to timing issues with the distribution of band funding. Specifically, variability in policies may lead to band funding being distributed to students after tuition is due, causing students to incur late penalties. While some universities make allowances for students who are experiencing delays in band funding, such measures often require a timely and proactive request by the student. Aboriginal students face significant financial barriers to attaining post-secondary education and late fees only serve to increase the pressures placed on the financial assistance system and compromise students' ability to persist in PSE.

Concern Twenty: There is lack specific funding for non-status and Métis Aboriginal students.

There are currently limited provincial or federal funds dedicated specifically towards financial aid for non-status and Métis Aboriginal students. The Métis Nation of Ontario's 2011 report titled "Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learners Achievement and Self-Identification Project"¹⁵⁸ cited a lack of federal PSSSP funding as a barrier to Métis students. Depending on institutional policies, these students may be eligible to access the Aboriginal Bursary program, but outside of this comparatively limited program, financial assistance targeted at these communities is primarily from non-governmental organizations, for example through Indspire. The MNO estimates the available funding from NGOs to Aboriginal students is roughly only \$2 million. Overall, 80% of respondents to a research survey identified funding as a major barrier to PSE.

Recommendations

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

Students believe that the federal government must uncap the PSSSP program and increase funding to a level that would provide full support for all eligible Aboriginal students. Given the stated objectives of both the provincial and federal governments to improve access to post-secondary education for all Aboriginal students, an arbitrary 2 per cent per annum cap that does not take into account population increases or actual costs is an unproductive policy. Over the next decade, 315,000 Aboriginal children are projected to be born throughout Canada.¹⁵⁹

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has estimated that the Aboriginal population aged 20-29 in Ontario is poised to grow by 22 per cent by 2017.¹⁶⁰ It is important that a comprehensive financial program is in place to meet the needs of these students as they prepare to enter post-secondary studies. The current federal PSSSP program does not do so. Students recommend an immediate removal of the 2 per cent cap, and a commitment to base future funding on the number of eligible applicants as is done with other federal student aid programs, to ensure qualified Aboriginal student is prevented from attending a post-secondary institution due to a lack of funding.

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

¹⁵⁸ Métis Nation of Ontario (2011) "Research on Effective Practices to Support Metis Learners Achievement and Self-Identification Project" Ottawa: MNO

¹⁵⁹ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2011) Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

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

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

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

Recommendation Twelve: The provincial government should expand the Access to Opportunities Strategy by investing in the creation of a new grant program for Aboriginal students.

Given the financial challenges Aboriginal students face, in addition to potential increasing demand coming from increased Aboriginal student participation in post-secondary education, the provincial government should invest in the creation of a new grant program to support students. Given the issues associated with the Aboriginal Bursary, the government should centralize the new bursary while maintaining a separation from OSAP. Decoupling the OSAP and bursary application supports Aboriginal student needs given that some students may want to avoid taking on debt, the grant will be more publicized (and therefore utilized) than an institutional program and criteria will be standardized. Further, grant programs should not be capped at a set total value, similar to OSAP the grant should be available to all who apply and have assessed need.

Recommendation Thirteen: The provincial government should partner with post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal Education Councils to ensure the Aboriginal Bursary is used efficiently.

Recognizing the challenges associated with the Aboriginal Bursary in its current form, the province, post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal Education Councils should work together to ensure the bursary is used efficiently and allocation processes are transparent. Institutions should retain control over allocating funds to students given their ability to respond to the needs of their students through a nuanced approach and in

a timely manner. However, accountability mechanisms must be introduced to ensure allocation processes are transparent, funds are utilized, and application criteria are fair.

In order to overcome the current challenges posed by the Aboriginal Bursary, it is recommended that Aboriginal Education Councils have input on the criteria for the bursary at each institution as well as oversight over the allocation of funds. Giving AEC's this authority will ensure that institutions are accountable for using best practices to determine criteria for how funds are allocated, as well as fully utilizing funds in approved mediums.

Recommendation Fourteen: The provincial government should increase funding for the Ontario Distance Grant.

Given that Aboriginal students may need to travel home more often than their non-Aboriginal peers and may experience higher than average costs to do so, the provincial government should increase funding as a means to encourage students to attend or persist in post-secondary education. Specifically, the Ontario Distance Grant should be increased to better support the needs of rural and northern students, for whom \$300 per term may not be enough to fund even one trip home. The government should allocate funding equitably, based on actual distance from a student's home to their post-secondary institution, thereby providing more funding for students in the most distant communities.

Recommendation Fifteen: Institutions should partner with the provincial government to create strategies to improve the available information on financial assistance available to Aboriginal students.

In order to increase financial assistance literacy among Aboriginal youth, post-secondary institutions and the provincial government should partner to create multi-faceted strategies that seek to: define student financial assistance options, dispel myths surrounding SFA which create financial barriers, provide support for students applying for SFA, work with bands to clarify band funding policies, increase awareness of SFA on university campuses and ensure student support staff have the ability to advise students on SFA matters. In order to increase Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education, it is evident that comprehensive strategies should be created to support students in all stages of post-secondary education, from the decision to apply to their time at university. It is important to any such strategy recognize the important role that communities, families, elders and band leadership play in informational decisions that Aboriginal learners make. As such, outreach to Aboriginal communities, and empowering them to provide potential learners with support is going to be important in reaching youth who may not otherwise have been motivated to even apply in the first place.

Recommendation Sixteen: The provincial government should extend OTG eligibility for Aboriginal students to cover their entire time spent attaining an undergraduate post-secondary education, regardless of date of graduation.

With such a large portion of the Aboriginal population being underserved by the OTG in its current form, OUSA recommends that eligibility for the grant be extended to all Aboriginal students (assuming they fit the other criteria) for the entirety of their

undergraduate post-secondary education regardless of high school graduation date. Investing in OTG ensures that social factors are considered, while allowing the government to avoid the high costs of introducing new financial assistance programs. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities estimates that the extension of OTG would cost approximately \$4 million dollars per year.

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

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

Recommendation Eighteen: The provincial government should eliminate late fees for all students receiving band funding.

As previously noted, variability in band policies often result in students not receiving funding allocations on time, missing tuition deadlines, and incurring late fees. Aboriginal students often face significant financial burdens with late fees only increasing these pressures and threatening their ability to persist in PSE. While some bands do commit to paying such late fees, this only leads to further stress on already limited band funding. As a result, the provincial government should mandate that institutions eliminate the use of late fees for all students waiting to receive band funding. Doing so will ensure that unnecessary strain is not placed on the financial assistance system and students are not threatened with deregistration as they wait for funding.

Student Support Services

Principles

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

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

Aboriginal students require specific student services to address their needs and ensure they have the support they need to persist and excel through their studies. Some of these

services overlap with general student support services that all students require, but Aboriginal students also benefit from specific support services designed to assist with some of the unique challenges they face in a university environment. Aboriginal students tend to be older than non-Aboriginal students, are more likely to be female, and are much more likely to have a dependant child.¹⁶¹ They also may have to travel large distances from their home communities and deal with an unfamiliar culture and environment that can lead to loneliness and frustration.¹⁶² Evidence suggests that the appropriate student support services can help combat these issues and decrease Aboriginal student attrition rates.¹⁶³ An American study of Aboriginal students found that availability of and engagement with specific Indigenous services was correlated with student success because these services allowed students to better connect with peers and faculty on campus.¹⁶⁴ Students believe that it is essential that Aboriginal students have access to adequate student support services at their post-secondary institution to enable them to successfully complete their post-secondary studies.

Principle Fifteen: Aboriginal student services should be funded sustainably in order to ensure the stability of services offered to students.

At many institutions the number of enrolled students who identify as Aboriginal is increasingly growing. This is a very positive trend, however institutions need to ensure that they have dedicated funding which guarantees that students will be consistently supported throughout their post-secondary careers. Currently, some Aboriginal specific support services are funded partially or fully through a provincial grant, which does not necessarily increase when the number of self-identified Aboriginal students does. There needs to be a consistent stream of funding available so that institutions can continue to provide these vital services for students.

Concerns

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

There is concern that post-secondary institutions often do not provide adequate specific support services Aboriginal students need to persist and excel throughout their studies. Aboriginal students have dropout rates that are between 33 and 56 per cent higher than those of non-Aboriginal students, indicating that these students are facing significant obstacles to completing their post-secondary studies.¹⁶⁵ Specific areas of support services that have been shown to impact Aboriginal student success are childcare services, housing support services, Aboriginal student centres, and cultural supports.

Housing Support Services

¹⁶¹ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁶² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. (2009). Post-secondary student access and retention strategies. Literature review, Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

¹⁶⁵ Berger, Joseph, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin. (2009). The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Aboriginal students “require a greater range and level of supports if they are to enter and remain in PSE programs, including measures to [...] address the higher level and incidence of housing...needs of Aboriginal learners.”¹⁶⁶ The literature indicates that affordable housing is a key factor for Aboriginal students because of their low-income status.¹⁶⁷ Despite this, few institutions offer housing support specifically geared towards Aboriginal students.¹⁶⁸

Aboriginal Student Centres

Aboriginal student centres refer to physical spaces on campus designed to be a ‘safe place’ for Aboriginal students, which may include a student lounge, mentoring, academic, and personal counselling support. Aboriginal student centres are important because they “provide sense of belonging and guidance to students who may find that the university environment is very different from environments in which they had previously lived”.¹⁶⁹ Evidence suggests they can combat feelings of isolation, racism, while generating greater awareness of Aboriginal programs among non-Aboriginal students and faculty members.¹⁷⁰

A Canada-wide survey found that 73 per cent of universities and colleges have some type of Aboriginal student centre, and it is believed that nearly every Ontario institution has a centre, though the services provided varies widely.¹⁷¹ Stakeholders at institutions in Ontario indicate that they view their Aboriginal student centres as a key component of attracting Aboriginal students to PSE and improving student retention.¹⁷² Nevertheless, stakeholders also expressed strong concerns that these centres were often severely underfunded, which compromised their ability to provide essential services to students.¹⁷³ Less than a third of Aboriginal student centres receive dedicated funding from the government, the private sector, or Aboriginal organizations.¹⁷⁴ Many Aboriginal student centres expressed a need for more physical space, tutors, counsellors, and administrative staff, in addition to funding and facilities for cultural and ceremonial events.

Cultural Supports

In addition to childcare facilities and Aboriginal student centres, cultural supports are also important in fostering Aboriginal student success in higher education. These can include activities and events that recognize Aboriginal languages and traditions, and raise the profile of Aboriginal culture on campus.¹⁷⁵ Cultural supports can include Elders in residence programs, whereby Aboriginal Elders come to the campus community for a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Council of Ministers of Education. (2010). *A Literature Review of Factors that Support Successful Transitions by Aboriginal People from K-12 to Postsecondary Education*. Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education.

¹⁶⁸ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁶⁹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. (2010). *Answering the call: The 2010 inventory of Canadian university programs and services for Aboriginal students*. Ottawa: AUCC.

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

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Holmes, David. (2006). *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁷⁵ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

period of time to act as role models and provide guidance for students. Other supports involve holding cultural events like pow-wows and smudging ceremonies throughout the year, and bringing in guest speakers. Cultural supports are important because they combat the alienation some Aboriginal students may feel transitioning to PSE institutions, provide connection with other Aboriginal students, faculty and community members, and can foster a sense of cultural identity and pride.¹⁷⁶ Many stakeholders involved with cultural supports for Aboriginal students have expressed concern over a lack of stable funding, and indicated that a lack of funding has constrained their ability to offer cultural activities and events.¹⁷⁷

Concern Twenty-Two: Funding models and structures for Aboriginal Student Centres vary across the province.

Across the province, the various Aboriginal student centres are funded in a variety of ways. Funding for aboriginal student services have been made available through the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities since 2009. Universities who apply for this provincial funding must re-apply every three years. Although this is an improvement in terms of stability in funding over the previous requirement where they needed to apply annually, it means that the funding cannot be responsive to growth during the three-year period. Further, even with the three year cycle, centres are reporting that the funding has not been increasing with enrollment growth and growth in Aboriginal attendees. The three-year cycle, combined with not being responsive to growth, means that long-term planning for Aboriginal student centres can be extremely difficult and unstable.¹⁷⁸ However other centres have explored other revenue sources, for example Western University funds their Aboriginal student centre through both the provincial grant and a student fee in order to cover the rest of the costs.¹⁷⁹

It has also been noted that the MTCU grant was originally intended for universities to be able to start their centres, and not meant to be a sustained source of funding. This lends to a concern that the funding was never intended to be a long-term source, and the future of that funding is unknown. Universities have not taken over funding their centres, and should this funding be removed, they would have to find a significant pocket of money in their budgets in order to keep their centres open.

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

The literature on the barriers that Aboriginal students face to education repeatedly indicates that childcare is a significant factor in determining whether to stay in post-secondary education. Nearly 30 per cent of Aboriginal post-secondary students report caring for a dependant child.¹⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, then, Aboriginal students are much more likely to spend time on dependant care responsibilities than non-Aboriginal students; 45 per cent of Aboriginal students spend time on dependant care responsibilities, compared

¹⁷⁶ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁷⁷ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁷⁸ Meeting with Janice Hill, Director of Four Directions Student Centre at Queen's University, Fall 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Meeting with Candace Brunette-Debassige, Co-ordinator of Indigenous Services at Western University, Fall 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

to just 23 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.¹⁸¹ A comprehensive literature review published in 2010 by the Council of Ministers of Education found that Aboriginal students are much more likely than non-Aboriginal students to face barriers to PSE attainment specifically because of their higher incidence of dependant care responsibilities. According to a survey cited in the study, “family responsibilities were the main reasons for [Aboriginal students] not completing PSE.”¹⁸² Caring for a child, younger sibling, or other family member means students with dependants have higher financial costs, but less time to spend working while enrolled in post-secondary studies.

16 of the 20 universities in Ontario provide childcare on campus, while only nine of which offer infant care. Wait times for these day care facilities vary by campus, but are frequently longer than a year. Many facilities could not provide a precise wait time, making it difficult for student parents to plan for future enrolment. Excessive wait times often mean that a student with a child will have to put off their education. Moreover, the wait times indicate that these facilities are understaffed or without enough space. There is also concern that the cost of on-campus childcare is prohibitively high, as shown in Table 1. While the provincial Childcare Bursary offers some support to parents, the maximum offered is \$70 per week for a single parent with no spousal support, and caregivers can only access this funding if they have three or more dependant children. This amounts to less than a third the weekly cost of day care at an Ontario institution. Finally, despite a strong need for childcare facilities among Aboriginal students, only 13 per cent of post-secondary institutions indicated having specific supports in place to help Aboriginal students find day care on- or off-campus.¹⁸³

Table 1: Average Cost of Childcare on Ontario University Campuses¹⁸⁴

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

Recommendations

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

To better meet the support services needs of Aboriginal students, the provincial government should work with the Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) established at

¹⁸¹ McCloy, U., & Sattler, P. (2010). From Postsecondary Application to the Labour Market: The Pathways of Under-represented Groups. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹⁸² Council of Ministers of Education. (2010). A Literature Review of Factors that Support Successful Transitions by Aboriginal People from K-12 to Postsecondary Education. Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education.

¹⁸³ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

¹⁸⁴ Based upon 2014 audit of daycare services in Ontario universities by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

each university to conduct an assessment of the support service needs of Aboriginal students.

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

There is strong evidence that specialized, built-in support mechanisms for Aboriginal students dramatically improve student enrolment and retention rates. For example, the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia is a large facility in the middle of campus that provides a comprehensive selection of student services including First Nations counselling, a computer centre, a childcare centre, a library, Elders programs, and a gathering space.¹⁸⁵ The establishment of equivalent comprehensive centres in Ontario requires sustainable funding. Aboriginal student supports should receive dedicated human and other resources that are integrated into the annual academic funding plans of institutions.

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

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

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

¹⁸⁵ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

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

Recommendation Twenty-One: The provincial and federal governments must provide funding for culturally appropriate day care services for Aboriginal students with dependants.

Without affordable, high quality childcare, many Aboriginal students face significant barriers in the pursuit of a university education. Aboriginal students who leave university or college before completing their credential consistently cite lack of affordable childcare as the primary reason why they leave the program.¹⁸⁶ In order to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal university attainment rates, both the federal and provincial government must prioritize affordable childcare for post-secondary students. In improving existing or planned day care services, providers should ensure that culturally appropriate options are made available to Aboriginal students.

Recommendation Twenty-Three: The provincial and federal government should provide funding for affordable and accessible day care services

The federal government must expand the need criteria of the PSSSP to fully cover the childcare costs incurred by Aboriginal students. Without including in the need assessment of students with dependants, their costs are vastly underestimated. Secondly, the provincial government should revamp the Childcare Bursary, so that any student with financial need and a dependant child can qualify, and the amount distributed through the bursary program more accurately reflects the real costs of childcare on Ontario campuses. Finally, the provincial government must provide targeted funding to universities toward the establishment of affordable, accessible, and culturally sensitive day care centres.

Recommendation Twenty-Four: The institutions and provincial government should dedicate consistent, annual funding for campus Aboriginal student centres, which should be responsive to enrollment increases.

On-campus Aboriginal student centres are consistently cited by students as a crucial source of support throughout their university careers. These centres face much uncertainty under the current funding model, which varies between institutions and

¹⁸⁶ Malatest, R.A. and Associates. *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

provides no assurance for sustainable existence. It is imperative the Aboriginal student centres have consistent, year over year funding, which would allow the centres to plan long term, and to have stability in their operations.

Due to the fact that the provincial grant was meant to only be a start-up fund, the government needs to re-commit to providing operational funding for these organizations. Further, they should remove the application process, and guarantee a base annual amount, which is responsive to growth in enrollment at the institution. Each institution should also be required to provide a portion of the funding for the centres. This would ensure the university is dedicated to and invested in their centre. The university's contribution should be consistent and sustainable so that the centres can be stable and able to grow their operations when necessary.

Employment

Principles

Principle Sixteen: University education has the ability to enhance students' labour market outcomes.

While university education provides students with opportunities for self-exploration and the ability to develop as citizens, this education also allows students to develop key skills that will allow them to succeed in the labour market following graduation. Critical thinking, writing, research skills and others developed during post-secondary education have a measurable impact on students' ability to obtain employment; in 2012 the unemployment rate for post-secondary graduates was 10.7 per cent, significantly lower than the general youth unemployment rate (16.9 per cent).¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, university graduates consistently attain higher levels of employment than college graduates over the long-term (population age 25 – 44), despite college graduates' higher employment rates in the short-term (population age 15 – 24).¹⁸⁸ Given university education's focus on providing transferrable soft skills, graduates experience stable employment and are more "recession proof" given their ability to easily apply their skills to new industries. As a result, university education remains a valuable investment for Ontario students.

Principle Seventeen: Work-integrated learning programs provide high-quality development opportunities for students, enhancing both their understanding of classroom theory and improving their labour market outcomes.

Work-integrated learning programs including: co-operative education, apprenticeships, internships, and service learning, are educational opportunities that integrate academic learning with workplace-based, practical applications. Work-integrated learning opportunities provide value to students by enabling students to apply academic theory, gain experience in industries related to their academic field, and develop soft skills (networking, resume building, etc.) to improve their employability. These opportunities, whether paid or completed for academic credit, often carry long-term benefits for students. Specifically, graduates who undertake a WIL placement average \$2 - \$3 more

¹⁸⁷ Statistics Canada (2012) *Labour Force Survey Estimates, by educational attainment, sex and age group (Ontario)* [CANSIM Table 282-0004] Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

¹⁸⁸ Martin, C (2013) *Youth Employment: Reimagining the link between learning and labour*. Toronto: OUSA.

per hour in earnings, and 82 per cent of employers who offer WIL positions offered post-graduate employment to a former student.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, WIL opportunities allow students to enhance their academic outcomes while gaining experience and building skills that will benefit them after graduation.

Principle Eighteen: The provincial and federal government and post-secondary institutions have a shared responsibility for helping students overcome barriers to employment.

Systemic historical and cultural factors have limited Aboriginal attainment of post-secondary education. The mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples over the course of history, and in particular through residential schools, created mistrust of government and educational institutions. Taken together with income and social barriers, Aboriginal attainment of post-secondary education has lagged behind that of the general population in Ontario, a gap that may widen in the coming decade if no changes are made.¹⁹⁰

As noted previously, post-secondary education generally leads to improved employment outcomes for those who attain a credential. For this reason, the provincial and federal governments must take responsibility for removing barriers to education for Aboriginal students, allowing all willing and qualified students to attend post-secondary education. However, government and post-secondary institutions also have a shared responsibility for ensuring student success in post-secondary education, a concept that includes students' successful transition out of post-secondary education. The provincial government has acknowledged this responsibility in its 2011 PSET Framework where it created the goal that "an increasing number of Aboriginal learners have the skills and formal education required to more actively participate in the changing labour market,"¹⁹¹ while creating supporting retention/completion and labour market transition strategies. The federal government and post-secondary institutions should create appropriate strategies to work towards the same ends.

Concerns

Concern Twenty-Four: Aboriginal people have lower levels of employment than the general population and wage gaps exist.

Aboriginal peoples have long experienced lower levels of employment than the general population, with TD Economics noting that gaps in employment rates not only persist, but progress towards closing them has stagnated.¹⁹² While Aboriginal students with a bachelor's degree experience employment rates similar to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (79 per cent to 81.6 per cent respectively), employment gaps between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals grow at lower levels of education. The 2011 National Household Survey¹⁹³ indicates that for those who have not completed a high-school

¹⁸⁹ Sattler P & Peters J (2012) *Work-integrated learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector: Survey of Employer Impressions*. Toronto: HEQCO

¹⁹⁰ Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education Conference, Plenary "Perspectives on Aboriginal Students Graduating from Canada's Colleges and Universities." Toronto: October 7, 2013.

¹⁹¹ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2011). *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

¹⁹² Fong and Gulati (2013) *Special Report: Employment and Education Among Aboriginal Peoples* Toronto: TD Economics

¹⁹³ Statistics Canada (2011) *National Household Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Available online: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/index-eng.cfm>

diploma, Aboriginals have a 30.1 per cent employment rate compared to 55.8 per cent for their non-Aboriginal peers. When taken as a whole, most concerning of all may be that the unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples in 2011 was double the rate of non-Aboriginals (15 per cent to 7.5 per cent).¹⁹⁴ These statistics speak to the pressing need to create strategies to increase Aboriginal attainment of post-secondary education given the demonstrated improvement in employment outcomes for graduates.

Furthermore, the fact that wage gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations persist is troubling. As is the case with employment, wage gaps are most prominent at lower levels of education. For example, TD Economics noted that Aboriginal people without a high-school diploma earn 76 per cent of the total income their non-Aboriginal peers earned in 2011.¹⁹⁵ However, Aboriginal people with a bachelor's degree earned 99 per cent of the income non-Aboriginals at the same education level earned. These persistent wage disparities can only be eliminated by either increasing subsidies to Aboriginal populations (a highly costly and unsustainable strategy) or by increasing Aboriginal attainment of post-secondary education by taking action to reduce the barriers that inhibit attainment.

Concern Twenty-Five: Aboriginal peoples tend to be concentrated in certain fields, and progression within chosen career paths can be limited.

Aboriginal populations are overrepresented in low-skilled industries, with resource extraction and construction dominating job growth. Despite accounting for 15 per cent of total Aboriginal employment, these sectors have accounted for 40 per cent of job growth since 2009.¹⁹⁶

OUSA supports young people making post-secondary and career choices that reflect their interests, capabilities and aspirations. However, this particularly high concentration of Aboriginal peoples in low-security and lower paying fields raises concern about the sustainability of employment options for Aboriginal peoples, particularly as Canada increasingly moves towards becoming a knowledge based economy.

Data shows that Aboriginal degree holders are overrepresented in fields including: education, health care, public administration, and legal studies while being underrepresented in: business, math and computer sciences, and engineering. Additionally, where Aboriginals are represented in high-skilled fields, they often experience difficulty in progressing to high-level positions in their chosen field. TD Economics cited education and health care as examples of industries where overrepresentations of Aboriginal Peoples is misleading as roughly 45 per cent of those employed are engaged in low-skilled positions (as opposed to approximately 30 per cent of non-Aboriginals) while only 20 per cent are engaged in high-skilled positions (compared to 30 per cent for non-Aboriginals).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Fong and Gulati (2013) *Special Report: Employment and Education Among Aboriginal Peoples* Toronto: TD Economics

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

Concern Twenty-Six: Non-government organizations have taken on a disproportionate level of responsibility for assisting Aboriginal students in finding employment or WIL opportunities.

Despite Aboriginal employment issues being well documented, it is non-government organizations, not government or institutions that have taken the lead in developing linkages and opportunities for Aboriginal students. Organizations like Indspire offer career coaching, mentorship, and job fairs that are targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students. While several post-secondary institutions offer work-integrated learning opportunities targeted specifically at Aboriginal students, these are often concentrated in industries where Aboriginal peoples are already overrepresented including: health care, education, resource extraction, or construction. OUSA is concerned that opportunities may be restricted to areas where there are already high numbers of Aboriginal students, leaving students who are interested in pursuing a path in an underrepresented field without the support to do so.

Concern Twenty-Seven: Government employment programs are general in nature and do not address specific Aboriginal or university student issues.

While university education provides valuable long-term benefits in the labour market, students often struggle to transition into employment after graduation or obtain experience related to their academic field. In addition, current programs aimed to improve Aboriginal student employment outcomes, either during summer semesters or post-graduation, often fail to meet their objectives. For example, the federal First Nations Job Fund¹⁹⁸ does not differentiate between groups of youth, treating them as a homogeneous block. Further, the program is only available to youth living on reserve who use the Income Assistance Program. Similarly, the Ministry of Natural Resources' Aboriginal Youth Work Exchange¹⁹⁹ program does not specifically focus on creating opportunities for post-secondary students and opportunities are created in industries where Aboriginal Peoples are already overrepresented.

Recommendations

Recommendation Twenty-Five: The provincial and federal governments should devote resources towards increasing Aboriginal PSE attainment in order to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes.

Given the impact that post-secondary education, and undergraduate university education in particular, have on improving youth's employment outcomes, the provincial and federal governments should devote resources to increase Aboriginal PSE attainment. The National Household Survey makes it apparent that the key to improving labour market outcomes (including higher levels of employment and wages) for Aboriginal peoples lies in their ability to access post-secondary education. Therefore, investments should be made in all areas that will increase attainment including: improving K – 12 education for Aboriginal students, outreach initiatives, and retention and Aboriginal Student Services at PSE institutions.

¹⁹⁸ Employment and Social Development Canada (2013) *First Nations Job Fund* Ottawa: Government of Canada. Available online: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/aboriginal/asets/job_fund.shtml

¹⁹⁹ Ministry of Natural Resources (2013) *Aboriginal Work Exchange Program* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Available online: http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Youth/2ColumnSubPage/STELo2_163398.html

Recommendation Twenty-Six: Government should provide funding to increase WIL opportunities for Aboriginal students, focusing in industries where Aboriginal peoples are underrepresented.

While targeted WIL opportunities for Aboriginal students may exist at some post-secondary institutions, they most often are sponsored by the private sector or are focused in areas where Aboriginal peoples are already overrepresented in the workforce. As a result, governments should look to support Aboriginal employment by incentivizing the development or enhancement of post-secondary WIL opportunities, with a focus on increasing opportunities in industries where Aboriginal peoples are currently underrepresented.

Recommendation Twenty-Seven: Government should facilitate the creation of partnerships between NGOs and post-secondary institutions to support Aboriginal student employment.

While many post-secondary institutions have developed Aboriginal career services, much of the burden for supporting students in this area has been taken on by NGOs, such as Indspire. To improve the effectiveness of NGOs while better supporting students, the provincial and federal government should incentivize the creation of partnerships between post-secondary institutions and NGOs that support Aboriginal students.

These partnerships can result in: institutions bringing students to NGO based events, institutions supporting events financially or promoting institutions' employment opportunities, integrating NGO services into institutions' own to better prepare Aboriginal students for the workforce, providing broader networks and networking opportunities, and giving students opportunities to work in industries linked to their academic program.

Developing partnerships between existing NGOs and post-secondary institutions will allow governments to support Aboriginal students without creating new programs, while allowing organizations that have an understanding of Aboriginal student needs to provide relevant programs and services. Additionally, it allows institutions to augment their own support services without increasing the cost of doing so dramatically.

Recommendation Twenty-Eight: Government should introduce employment initiatives targeted towards Aboriginal and university student needs.

In order to close employment and wage gaps for Aboriginal youth, government programs should be introduced to provide post-secondary students with experience and the skills necessary to transition into the labour force after graduation. Programs must be tailored to post-secondary student needs (such as by linking students with opportunities in their academic field and providing skills development training), and be targeted specifically to Aboriginal youth in post-secondary programs in order to be effective.

Recommendation Twenty-Nine: Investments should be made to increase opportunities for Aboriginal student entrepreneurship.

While Aboriginal students are generally averse to debt, they are also more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be concerned about their ability to pay off their debt after graduation. Additionally, while many students want to utilize their post-secondary education to better their communities, high levels of unemployment on reserves may limit their ability to do so.²⁰⁰ As a result, governments should support Aboriginal student employment by helping them to become entrepreneurs and support the creation of jobs in their community. Grant programs and training opportunities have the ability to provide the skills and financing to create successful businesses.

Recommendation Thirty: Government should incentivize the creation of Aboriginal focused employment services on campus, or expand services where they currently exist.

Aboriginal peoples can face additional barriers in transitioning from post-secondary education into the labour market. Students therefore believe that Aboriginal-focused career services should be encouraged as part of the comprehensive support services available to Aboriginal students. This kind of programming might involve careers-fairs, employer-student link ups, resources, workshops etc. Where dedicated services do not currently exist, funding should be set aside to help develop initiatives, and where Aboriginal student centres or careers centres are providing services, additional funding should be provided to help increase capacity.

Institutional transformation

Principles

Principle Nineteen: Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students benefit from post-secondary institutions that incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, values, pedagogy, and language into both classroom instruction and the institution's wider environment in a manner that recognizes the importance of Aboriginal program control and delivery.

Historically, the formal education system in Ontario has not welcomed Aboriginal students or valued their knowledge and perspectives. Given the legacy of mistrust, stemming from both the residential school system and a traditionally Eurocentric post-secondary system, it is critical that the current post-secondary system values and integrates Aboriginal perspectives into the institutional environment and curriculum on an equal footing with Eurocentric views. As one focus group participant, commenting on curricula noted: "...it's all European – European, European, European. Who decided that they were the ones who got to write every history, from their perspective?"²⁰¹ A more inclusive post-secondary system can only be implemented in conjunction with consultation and direction from Aboriginal nations, communities and organizations. Students believe that a post-secondary system that recognizes and affirms Aboriginal identities is a key step in raising the post-secondary participation rates of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

²⁰⁰ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). First generation post-secondary education students. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

²⁰¹ Queen's University Focus Group, Kingston: January 15, 2014

Post-secondary institutions have been working to increase the presence of Aboriginal knowledge in their course and program offerings. Students believe this is a positive step, but one which requires careful attention to the importance of Aboriginal control and delivery of Aboriginal programs. Past efforts to include Aboriginal curriculum at mainstream institutions have been largely decided by non-Aboriginals, due to a combination of Eurocentric traditions of scholarship and also pressure to fit content into pre-existing formats and guidelines.²⁰²

In contexts where Aboriginal organizations and communities have controlled program content and delivery, programs have tended to be more successful in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal learners.²⁰³ Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, which have been present in Canada since the 1970s, have had success in attracting and graduating Aboriginal students, because these institutions pioneered the use of traditional teaching methods, consultation with Elders, partnership with the community, and Aboriginal administrators and professors at the post-secondary level.²⁰⁴ Students believe that maintaining Aboriginal control of Aboriginal post-secondary education programs is important in ensuring that the structure and content of these programs truly reflects Aboriginal values and knowledge.

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

Both Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal-managed and operated institutions are important in fostering a post-secondary environment that welcomes and values Aboriginal perspectives. There are 20 accredited universities in Ontario, all of which have received accreditation to offer university level courses through provincial or federal legislation. Aboriginal-managed institutions are institutions that were created by and for Aboriginal communities, to serve the specific educational needs of Aboriginal students, and are administered and taught primarily by Aboriginal faculty. These institutions are not independently accredited by provincial legislation, but many offer university level courses in partnership with an accredited institution. There are currently nine Aboriginal managed post-secondary institutions in Ontario that have educated nearly 30,000 students since first being established in the 1970s.²⁰⁵

Students believe that Aboriginal programs and courses are a valuable part of the comprehensive university education, and provide valuable contexts, perspectives and learning opportunities for all students regardless of background.

Aboriginal programs and courses within accredited post-secondary institutions are valuable in several ways. They provide Aboriginal students with the opportunity to study Aboriginal issues at well-established institutions with a wide variety of course selections

²⁰² R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

²⁰⁵ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

both within Aboriginal and outside of the Aboriginal curriculum. The presence of Indigenous Studies departments at accredited institutions also provides non-Aboriginal students the opportunity to engage with course content on Aboriginal issues, and interact with Aboriginal students, faculty, and staff.²⁰⁶ Aboriginal controlled institutions of higher learning, however, fill several voids left by accredited institutions. Most accredited institutions are located outside of Aboriginal communities in large urban areas. Moreover, accredited institutions serve a diverse body of students, and have no specific mandate to cater to the needs of the Aboriginal community.

In contrast, Aboriginal-managed institutions have mandates that specifically focus on providing Aboriginal education to serve the needs of Aboriginal communities, and gear the majority of their content to these objectives. Aboriginal managed institutions located in Aboriginal communities serve those students unable or unwilling to leave their community to pursue a higher education. In this way, these institutions mitigate much of the financial and social hardship created in moving to a university campus.²⁰⁷ Aboriginal post-secondary institutions have nearly doubled their enrolment in North America in the past five years, and experience 80 per cent to 90 per cent student success in completing educational programs.²⁰⁸ Both Aboriginal programs within accredited post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal controlled institutions serve important needs in terms of raising the profile, accessibility and quality of Aboriginal PSE in Ontario.

Principle Twenty-One: Ontario's post-secondary institutions should strive to be safer, more welcoming spaces for Aboriginal students

All students should be able to feel safe and welcomed at their university, and to feel valued and respected by their peers, faculty and staff, and the institution itself. However, as noted by a focus group participant, Aboriginal students are often leaving behind their culture and may face additional barriers in feeling welcomed on campus: ““Once you leave [your reserve] [...] that's leave your language behind, leave your community behind, and you go basically to a foreign school, where you have to learn that language, and that way of being.”²⁰⁹ Institutions should consult with their students, Aboriginal Educational Councils, and communities to explore the roots feeling unwelcomed, and explore strategies to address this.

Principle Twenty-Two: Many institutions are located on the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples.

OUSA acknowledges that many of Ontario's institutions are located on or near the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples, and recognizes that prior to colonization the continent of North America was home to diverse populations of peoples and nations, with their own distinctive cultures and histories.

OUSA's member schools are located on or near the traditional lands of the following First Nations: Six Nations of the Grand River (McMaster, Waterloo, Laurier), Mississaugas of the New Credit (McMaster) Haudenosaunee/Anishinaabe (Queen's)

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²⁰⁸ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). *A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy*. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

²⁰⁹ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Queen's University, January 15 2014

Mississaugas of Scugog Island (Trent-Oshawa) Oneida Nation of the Thames/Chippewas of the Thames First Nation (Western).

Principle Twenty-Three: Aboriginal admissions policies can have a positive impact on increasing access for Aboriginal students at institutions.

Given the historical context of racism, underfunding and lack of opportunity, Aboriginal students may face significant barriers in accessing PSE. Throughout OUSA's consultations with Aboriginal student centres, Aboriginal admissions policies were frequently referenced as being a positive impact on improving the number of Aboriginal students at an institution.

Aboriginal admissions policies might include some of the following features:

- Admitting students at the minimum program requirement rather than the competition average, which may be significantly higher;
- Training staff familiar with barriers and service strategies unique to Aboriginal students in order to process applications by these students;
- Responding to applications made by Aboriginal students as they arrive rather than in batches in order to give a speedier response (an issue that was identified by Aboriginal students as important in helping inform their PSE decision);
- Using Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLARs) in order to take a more holistic view of an applicant's previous formal and informal studies.

Trent University runs a successful access program for Aboriginal students: through this program 20-25 learners are admitted to a diploma program that then leads to a BA/BSc program, over a four year period. The program includes skills courses, indigenous studies, and course specific content, and has a higher retention rate than the general population, of 97 per cent.²¹⁰

Another successful strategy noted by Aboriginal centre staff was "second look" approaches, where students who have failed to meet admissions requirements are invited to explore potential other options to attaining PSE, whether through partnerships with local colleges, transition programs or skills upgrading.

Concerns

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

Despite the increasing numbers of Aboriginal-focused courses and departments at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal content and structure is often presented as subordinate to European worldviews, and treated as irrelevant to subject areas outside of Indigenous Studies.²¹¹ One report cites subtle and systemic racism as the "biggest barrier for FN [First Nations] learning."²¹² As a participant in Aboriginal post-secondary education strategies put it, "[Non-Aboriginal people] are allowed to be

²¹⁰ Interview with Emerance Baker, Director of First Peoples House of Learning, Trent University. Fall 2013.

²¹¹ For a definition of "Indigenous Knowledge" please see the Early Outreach section of this paper.

²¹² Battiste, Marie. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations. World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal. Accessed at: <http://www.win-hec.org/>.

ignorant of Aboriginal people. Thus we exercise racism unconsciously.”²¹³ Several Aboriginal students have cited faculty as presenting discriminatory or subtly racist perspectives in classes.²¹⁴ This attitude is reflected in the hierarchy of knowledge, where Aboriginal knowledge is seen often understood as only having relevance in a cultural, artistic, or historic sense.²¹⁵

In addition, there are difficulties in making the more substantive changes to the pedagogical and evaluative structure of universities that would incorporate Aboriginal methodologies and pedagogies. To a large extent, current initiatives to include Indigenous Studies in university programs have focused on content, rather than structural changes.

While Aboriginal Pedagogical approaches may vary according between cultures and peoples, these approaches may include the following elements:

- A holistic approach to knowledge, that references the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of learning, and learning through the interpretation of collective knowledge;
- Encouraging focus on the individual learner and their perception, rather than objective analysis of external world – valuing self-directed approaches to learning;
- A focus on the sharing and transmission of knowledge through experiential forms of learning, with emphasis on observing and doing, learning through action, and individualized instruction;
- Utilising both empirical (experienced based) and normative (values based) forms of knowledge;
- The use of storytelling to encourage learners to actively participate in finding their own significance.^{216,217}

A more comprehensive approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in post-secondary curriculum would recognize the contributions to diverse fields of study that Indigenous knowledge has made, and also the alternative methodologies for study that can be found in Aboriginal knowledge. In order to support student success, institutions should consider implementing Aboriginal pedagogies or portions thereof, where possible.

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

Many of the longstanding norms and practices of post-secondary institutions are based on the values and cultural norms of non-Aboriginal society.²¹⁸ As a result, “many

²¹³ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²¹⁴ McMaster University. (28 October 2010). *Aboriginal Focus Group*.

²¹⁵ Battiste, Marie. (2005). *Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations*. World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium Journal. Accessed at: <http://www.win-hec.org/>.

²¹⁶ Leik, Vivian (1992) “Bringing Indigenous Perspectives into Education. Victoria: University of Victoria.

²¹⁷ First Nations Pedagogy Online (2009) “Best Practices.” Available online: <http://firstnationspedagogy.ca/practices.html>

²¹⁸ First Nation, Métis & Inuit Centre for Excellence. (2008). *Transforming Aboriginal Post-Secondary Accessibility Exemplary Practices Discussion Paper*. Vancouver: Coastal Corridor Consortium.

Aboriginal students do not see themselves or their culture reflected in the typical Canadian university setting.”²¹⁹ Aboriginal students may experience strong anxiety related to feeling out of place in the institutional culture of university, and also being torn between the university environment and their commitment to their families and home communities.²²⁰ While significant attempts have been made to foster a more inclusive institutional environment, issues of alienation for Aboriginal students still persist.

Concern Twenty-Nine: There is an underrepresentation of Aboriginal faculty at Ontario’s universities.

While data on the Aboriginal status of Canadian professors is scarce, figures suggest that the number of Aboriginal faculty is low, and growing at a slow rate as shown in Table 2²²¹ below:

Table 2: % of professors in Canada, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal (White)			
	1996	2001	2006
Aboriginal	0.5	0.7	1.0
Non-Aboriginal (White)	83.9	82.4	84.2

As is shown, between 1996 and 2006 the number of Aboriginal professors in Canada grew by only half a percent, and the professoriate in Canada has remained overwhelmingly white. As was summed up by one focus group participant: “There’s just not enough Indigenous faculty.”²²²

Concern Thirty: Even where offered, Aboriginal courses or programs may be over-subscribed or unavailable to interested students.

Students report that even where courses or programs featuring Aboriginal content, they may be insufficient to meet the demand or needs of Aboriginal students. For example, participants at an OUSA focus group referenced a recently implemented Indigenous Studies minor that, although they identified as a step forward, relied heavily on courses that were already available. In the words of a participant: “we were grasping at straws, we could technically say that’s an indigenous course – but in a twelve week course 1 week touches on indigenous people.”²²³ Another focus group participant felt that courses that attempt to include Aboriginal content are often well intentioned, but when poorly delivered by faculty without full understanding of the issues, can actually reinforce negative stereotypes.²²⁴

However, ideally Native or Indigenous Studies program can be an empowering space for students, and some students reported the presence of more indigenous faculty made

²¹⁹ Holmes, David. (2006). Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

²²⁰ Finnie, Ross, Stephen Childs, and Andrew Wismer. (2010). First Generation post-secondary education students. L-SLIS Research Brief, Toronto: MESA Project.

²²¹ Canadian Association of University Teachers (2013) *CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education in Canada 2013-14* Ottawa: CAUT and Canadian Association of University Teachers (2007) *CAUT Equity Review* Ottawa: CAUT – data based on Statistics Canada Census data.

²²² Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Queen’s University, January 15 2014

²²³ *ibid*

²²⁴ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Wilfrid Laurier University, January 2014

professors relatable and understanding of student issues (for example child care). Students also reported appreciating the teaching styles of these programs, which tended to be more participatory than other classes.²²⁵

Concern Thirty-One: Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions are often inadequately supported by the provincial and federal government.

Currently, the federal government provides funding for Aboriginal program development and design through a component of the PSSSP called the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). However, ISSP funding is limited to 12 per cent of PSSSP funding as a whole, which is generally insufficient to meet the demand for Aboriginal curriculum and course development. Any increases in funding beyond 12 per cent of the PSSSP pool would take away from the funding available to support individual students through federal band funding. Compounding this issue is the fact that the number of Aboriginal institutions competing for ISSP funding has dramatically increased in recent years.²²⁶ For example, in 2001-2002 Ontario's Aboriginal post-secondary institutions received approximately \$3.1 million in funding through the federal ISSP program, but requested nearly four times that amount.²²⁷ Finally, while ISSP funding can be used for curriculum development, it cannot be applied to operating costs, leaving a funding void for Aboriginal managed institutions.

At the provincial level, in 2008-2009 year, the government consolidated Aboriginal program funding under the Post-Secondary Education Funding for Aboriginal Learners (PEFAL) program. Under this program, a total of \$24.6 million is allocated to Aboriginal education initiatives, but only 14 per cent of this money is directly sent to Aboriginal-managed institutions,²²⁸ and they must reapply for funding with formal proposals each year as multi-year agreements are not permitted under current guidelines.²²⁹

Because none of the Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in Ontario are accredited degree- or diploma-granting institutions, they must partner with an accredited institution to access ISSP and PEFAL funding.²³⁰ The partner institution bestows the actual diploma or degree given to a student, on behalf of the Aboriginal institution where they likely completed most of their course of study. As a result of this partnership model, rather than funding being directly provided to Aboriginal institutions, accredited institutions receive annual operating grants from the provincial government for the students studying at Aboriginal institutes.²³¹ Aboriginal institutions are unable to fully recoup this funding from the partner institution, because they often must pay administrative and other fees for the partnership. Moreover, while in some cases

²²⁵ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Western University, January 2014

²²⁶ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

²²⁷ *ibid*

²²⁸ Frechette, Jean-Guy. (Feb. 22nd, 2011). Ontario's Aboriginal Education Strategy: Presentation to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Toronto: Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education.

²²⁹ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

²³⁰ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

²³¹ The Aboriginal Institute's Consortium. (2005). A struggle for the education of Aboriginal students, control of Indigenous Knowledge and recognition of Aboriginal institutions: An examination of government policy. Ohsweken, ON: Canada Race Relations Foundation.

students at Aboriginal-managed institutions do spend significant time at the partner institutions and utilize partner resources, often the Aboriginal institution is located at great distance from the partner, and students may spend little or no actual time at the partner institution.

While partnerships in many cases have been valuable to both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, the current lack of legislative accreditation and autonomous funding has been a point of contention between Aboriginal-managed institutions and the federal and provincial governments. The Assembly of First Nations likened the current system to Aboriginal institutions being “forced to pay double the cost to operate and deliver post-secondary programs.”²³² The inadequate, unstable funding support for Aboriginal-managed institutions has significant consequences for student access to post-secondary education. Estimates have put the provincial support for students studying at Aboriginal post-secondary institutions at a seventh that of students studying in accredited colleges and universities. In the 2007-2008 year, this amounted to \$1,527 per student.²³³ Aboriginal institutions often have waiting lists or have to refuse students because they are unable to fund enough spaces to meet student demand.²³⁴

Concern Thirty-Two: Some students feel that their institutions could be more welcoming towards Aboriginal people.

Students in OUSA’s focus groups reported a range of experiences that limited their ability to feel fully welcomed in their institution. These included:

- Hostile reactions to cultural practices (for example drumming);
- Other students during in-class discussions assuming no Aboriginal students were present, and therefore talking as if they are not present;
- Alternatively students being called on as the token Aboriginal student, and asked to comment on any issues which might arise;
- Other students making assumptions about their experiences, particularly as regards to admissions policies and how much financial aid received;
- Feeling looked down on for being Aboriginal.

More broadly students discussed the lack of any meaningful display of Aboriginal culture, the use of Aboriginal languages in signage etc.

Concern Thirty-Three: Institutions often do not make acknowledgement of Aboriginal land claims.

Despite the location of many of Ontario’s universities on traditional lands, students noted that they very rarely hear acknowledgement of the land claims of Aboriginal peoples, either through signage or at ceremonies/events (unless the event is on a specifically indigenous topic).²³⁵ Some students felt that this contributed to a lack of feeling “welcomed” by their institution.

²³² Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

²³³ Ontario Native Education Counselling Association. (2009). Factsheet. Naughton, ON.

²³⁴ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²³⁵ Queen’s University Focus Group, Kingston: January 15, 2014

Concern Thirty-Four: Students have inadequate awareness of Aboriginal admissions policies.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike may have an inadequate awareness of Aboriginal admissions policies. This lack of awareness may have multiple effects, including: potential students being unaware that they may qualify under an admissions policy; current students may have misconceptions about students who have (or they believe may have) been admitted under an Aboriginal admissions policy; and current Aboriginal students may fear discrimination based on lack of understanding.

Aboriginal admissions policies exist in order to address the structural barriers that many young Aboriginal students may have faced. As one focus group participant noted, many Aboriginal young people do not have access to the same supports as non-Aboriginal students, including the fact that many young Aboriginal students are first generation: “A lot of our Aboriginal students don’t have that same access [...] their parents might not have been able to afford tutors or private school...”²³⁶

However, there is a lack of clarity and openness across the system about admissions policies, so potential students may find it difficult to assess whether they are able to apply under an admissions policy, and if so what considerations they will get at one institution compared to another. This lack of openness and clarity may also contribute to current students’ misconceptions about the purpose and use of Aboriginal admissions policies, and contribute to misconceptions about the academic qualifications of Aboriginal students.

Recommendations

Recommendation Thirty-One: The federal and provincial governments with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders should take concrete action towards the elimination of racism, providing access to Aboriginal course content, Aboriginal faculty, administrative and support staff.

The federal and provincial government must continue to work with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders to ensure that progress continues to be made in fostering a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students on Ontario campuses. Aboriginal course content and structure should be available to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that incorporates Aboriginal knowledge and, when possible, this curriculum should be delivered by Aboriginal faculty and staff.²³⁷ In addition to curriculum changes, institutions should acknowledge the racism and discrimination that too often colours the experiences of Aboriginal learners and work with existing support networks and diversity centres to address this issue at the level of the institution as a whole.²³⁸ Finally, at non-Aboriginal institutions, there should be Aboriginal representation at all levels of leadership, to ensure that Aboriginal communities are consulted in the development and implementation of Aboriginal curriculum and other student services. This could take the

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

²³⁸ First Nation, Métis & Inuit Centre for Excellence. (2008). Transforming Aboriginal Post-Secondary Accessibility Exemplary Practices Discussion Paper. Vancouver: Coastal Corridor Consortium.

form of representation on governing boards, consultation with Elders, or expansion of the role of AECs.²³⁹

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

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

It is important that the provincial government recognize the important role Aboriginal institutions can play in raising post-secondary attainment rates for Aboriginal students, and fund them accordingly.²⁴⁰ Guidelines should be created to enable Aboriginal-managed institutions to receive operating funding in the form of an FTE amount similar to accredited colleges and universities. This would give more authority to the Aboriginal institutions to deliver programs and help ensure that dollars intended for Aboriginal students are being spent on its intention.²⁴¹

In addition, many of the funding problems that Aboriginal-managed post-secondary institutions face stem from their current lack of independent accreditation, despite acknowledgement by other institutions and the government as offering a variety of college and university level courses. Without accreditation, the only way Aboriginal institutions can ensure that their students' credentials are broadly recognized by academics and employers is to partner with an existing accredited university or college. The Aboriginal Institutes Consortium, a group of Aboriginal-managed institutions in Ontario, has created a task-force to work towards standardization of procedures between consortium members and meeting the provincial criteria for independent accreditation.²⁴² The provincial government should work with the Consortium, as well as individual Aboriginal institutions, towards college- and university-level accreditation for qualified Aboriginal-managed institutions.

Recommendation Thirty-Three: Institutions should provide anti-racist Aboriginal cultural training for administrators, faculty and staff.

Unfortunately, many Aboriginal students still encounter racism, stereotypes and an unwelcoming environment when they arrive at university. To facilitate the development of a more Aboriginal-friendly campus environment, the government, Aboriginal communities, and institutions should instate Aboriginal cultural training for university administrators, faculty and staff. The specific form the training would take, would vary from institution to institution, but would respond to a widespread need for the broader

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

²⁴¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2004). Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

²⁴² Roy, Stephanie. (March 2011). Session G: Building Postsecondary Education and Training System Capacity. Conference Presentation. Toronto: Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Gathering.

university community to develop a clear understanding of the issues Aboriginal students face on post-secondary campuses. In some instances, it may make sense to couch this training within existing diversity services and training, while at other campuses there may be a need for cultural training as a stand-alone program. Students believe the decision of how Aboriginal cultural training is implemented is best left to the Aboriginal communities at institutions.

Recommendation Thirty-Four: Institutions should seek to include Aboriginal perspectives in undergraduate curriculum, and ensure that Aboriginal courses or programs have the required number of faculty needed to meet student demand.

Institutions can support the development of courses that include Aboriginal perspectives, cultures and pedagogies in a number of ways: through developing courses or programs of study that exclusively explore aspects of Aboriginal culture, history or knowledge, or through including Aboriginal knowledge in established areas of the curriculum. Some best practices of this latter approach include science courses at U of T taught from an Aboriginal perspective, in order to help Aboriginal students complete their science requirements, and the inclusion of Algonquin teachings for all new law students at the University of Ottawa.²⁴³

In addition, the government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities on campus, should fund and develop pedagogical resources designed to assist non-Aboriginal professors in learning how to present Aboriginal course content appropriately, such as supporting more participatory or experiential approaches to knowledge acquisition. This could involve building stronger relationships between on-campus Aboriginal services, and professors and administrators.

While institutions should be commended for making greater moves towards offering Aboriginal content, courses and programmes as part of their curriculum, it is important that these be well supported by knowledgeable and culturally sensitive teaching staff, in order to offer a high quality experience to all interested students.

Recommendation Thirty-Five: In order to provide a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal students, institutions should commit to recognizing and incorporating Aboriginal culture on their campuses in a meaningful way.

In OUSA focus groups, Aboriginal students reported that they wished to see a stronger commitment from their institution to celebrating Aboriginal cultures and histories on campus, and particular mentioned the need for visible, non-tokenistic, cultural displays. One student compared Ontario's universities to the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria where large First Nations houses are centrally located on campus, and that incorporates signage that acknowledges the land claims of the Salish people.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Rosenbluth, Ellen Kachuck (2011) Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education: Building on Best Practices. Kingston, Queen's University. <http://www.cou.on.ca/policy-advocacy/policy---advocacy-pdfs/indigenous-issues-in-post-secondary-education---co>

²⁴⁴ Aboriginal Students Focus Group, Queen's University, January 15 2014

Other recommendations for ensuring institutional commitment to Aboriginal inclusion might include:

- Aboriginal representation on Board of Governors;
- Creating opportunities for senior leadership to hear and understand the experiences and goals of Aboriginal learners;
- Providing resources to ensure that staff who oversee Aboriginal student success are full time staff, rather than part time contract staff;
- Identifying and collaborating with allies within the institution;
- Consulting students and their representatives;
- Sharing research and best practices between colleges and universities;
- Treating students and staff respectfully by attempting to understand the unique needs of Aboriginal learners, including who they are, their goals, and what success means to them;
- Encouraging Aboriginal students to submit their work to journals and other publications to help develop student confidence in their learning ability.²⁴⁵

Recommendation Thirty-Six: Institutions that are located on traditional territories should commit to recognition of Aboriginal land claims.

Students identified acknowledgement of land claims as one strategy for universities to signal a more welcoming and accepting space for Aboriginal students. This was echoed as a key strategy in a report back from the 2011 Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education conference, which suggested that ‘acknowledging Indigenous people’s territory at every opportunity, including at every convocation address by the President’ could be a key strategy for to ensure institutional commitment to inclusion. Further, these commitments would raise awareness among the wider staff, faculty and student populations of the presence of Aboriginal peoples and issues regarding the ongoing barriers faced by Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendation Thirty-Seven: Admissions policies should be more widely available and included in high level strategic planning.

Institutions should commit to being more open about their Aboriginal admissions policies, and ensuring that both potential and current students understand the terms of the Aboriginal Admissions Policy, and the purpose of the policy. Ideally, Aboriginal admissions policies should be clearly articulated at all university run early outreach and young people should fully understand the process in order to apply under the policy. Further, the policy should be made available both on the admissions and Aboriginal Student Centre areas of an institution’s website.

It is also important to the success of an admissions policy that it has support from senior administrators. OUSA’s consultations with Aboriginal Student Centre staff revealed that the numbers of students admitted under access programs can fall without the support and advocacy of staff. OUSA therefore believes Aboriginal Admissions Policies should be included as part of an institution’s strategic planning, and evaluations of the success of

²⁴⁵ Rosenbluth, Ellen Kachuck (2011) *Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education: Building on Best Practices*. Kingston, Queen’s University. <http://www.cou.on.ca/policy-advocacy/policy---advocacy-pdfs/indigenous-issues-in-post-secondary-education---co>

the policy (number of students enrolled, retention and graduation rates, etc.) should be reported on a regular basis.

Evaluation

Principles

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

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

Any successful evaluation project will require the self-identification of Aboriginal learners. OUSA recognizes the significant historical and cultural barriers that limit the willingness of Aboriginal students to self-identify. It is imperative that the provincial government and institutions work closely with Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Education Councils, and Aboriginal students to ensure conditions are in place, which allay student fears regarding self-identification and which encourage students to do so. These conditions may include: guarantees of privacy and use of data; multiple opportunities for self-identification; the ability to withdraw or edit self-identification data; better communication on the benefits of self-identification; and the ability for students to identify themselves in a way that matches their own understanding of their cultural identity.

If Ontario's universities are able to create better systems for encouraging Aboriginal students to self-identify, this would greatly improve the ability of individual institutions, and the province as a whole, to target services, programming and supports to Aboriginal learners.

Concerns

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

There are widespread difficulties in gathering comprehensive data about Aboriginal application, admission, enrolment and persistence rates at post-secondary institutions in Ontario.²⁴⁶ Different data sources may use different criteria for Aboriginal identity. For example, some surveys include those reporting general "Aboriginal ancestry" as

²⁴⁶ Stephanie Oldford and Charles Ungerleider. (2010). *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Aboriginal and some only consider individuals who currently identify as “First Nations”, “Métis”, or “Inuit” to be Aboriginal. In addition census data may underreport the level of Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education, due to the tendency of Aboriginal people to not participate in census data collection.²⁴⁷

Some individuals may also be reluctant to self identify as Aboriginal.²⁴⁸ For example, a recent inventory of Aboriginal programs at post-secondary institutions found that there were substantial differences between the number of students who self-identified as Aboriginal and the number of students identified as Aboriginal through institutional data.²⁴⁹ Lakehead University has taken steps to formally report the number of Aboriginal students attending classes, as well as the number of Aboriginal graduates from each program, but they are in the minority.²⁵⁰ Many institutions lack the resources and motivation to track Aboriginal students, even within their own institution.

Concern Thirty-Six: The data that does exist on Aboriginal attainment often does not include wider metrics to measure Aboriginal success.

Even where reliable enrolment and attainment data do exist, it often does not include metrics to holistically measure Aboriginal student success. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities echoed this sentiment in the 2011 “Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework,” and included responsiveness to Aboriginal student needs and high levels of success in PSE as two of the four goals for the framework.

As noted in the final report of the 2011 Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education conference,²⁵¹ it is imperative that all stakeholders develop an understanding of students’ definition of success.

Concern Thirty-Seven: Some Aboriginal students may be unwilling to self-identify themselves as Aboriginal and may not be aware of the benefits of self-ID.

While stakeholders in post-secondary education have made improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students a clear priority, it is difficult to measure the efficacy of institutional and provincial efforts without identifying the students affected. Aboriginal self-identification questions consequently have the ability to improve programming and services directed towards Aboriginal students while connecting students to both funding opportunities and Aboriginal communities.

However, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) *Aboriginal Self-Identification Project Final Report*²⁵² outlined several challenges to self-identification. Self-ID questions have previously defined Aboriginals as a homogeneous group rather than recognizing distinct bands. Additionally, students are concerned that self-ID questions may reinforce negative stereotypes that Aboriginal students receive special treatment or

²⁴⁷ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Kachuck Rosenbluth, Ellen (2011) *Indigenous Issues in Postsecondary Education: Building on best practices*. Kingston: Queen’s University.

²⁵² Council of Ontario Universities (2013) *Aboriginal Self-Identification Project Final Report* Toronto: COU

that students may be singled out by instructors or peers as experts on Aboriginal issues. These challenges present barriers to identifying as Aboriginal for many students, even where the benefits of self-identifying are known.

Concern Thirty-Eight: There is insufficient transparency and information sharing between institutions.

While initiatives and resources to support Aboriginal students have developed and exist at most Ontario universities, OUSA's consultations demonstrate a lack of transparency and information sharing between institutions in this area. In interviews conducted with Aboriginal student services staff it was highlighted that there is a lack of transparency in Aboriginal student admissions systems across the sector²⁵³ while also noting the potential benefits that could arise from information sharing on retention strategies.

Additionally, while all universities OUSA consulted feature outreach programming, there is minimal evidence of information sharing across institutions, except where Aboriginal Centre staff have taken it upon themselves to do so. While institutional and community differences must be reflected in programming choices, information sharing could improve the effectiveness of programming and lead to the development of outreach best practices. Given budget cuts across the sector, information sharing and transparency could lead to more efficient use of resources within institutions.

Concern Thirty-Nine: The Ontario Ombudsman currently has no oversight over universities, meaning Aboriginal students have little recourse for complaints regarding their university experience.

The Ontario Ombudsman fulfills a critical accountability and oversight function for many areas of the Province, yet has no jurisdiction over municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals, the only province where this is the case. Therefore, in many aspects of student life there is no recourse for complaints, including in many instances against the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, against Children's Aid Societies, and institutions themselves. It is concerning that students do not have access to this option to resolve complaints given that a majority, 66 per cent, are resolved within two weeks of filing.

Recommendations

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

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

²⁵³ Interview with Candace Brunette-Debassige, Coordinator of Indigenous Services at Western University. (October 23, 2013)

student goals. Different programs may have different standards of success, and diverse measures should be used, taking into account local contexts.

Several Aboriginal organizations have called for greater information gathering and sharing regarding Aboriginal programs, including a forum to share best practices and a national website where information about successful initiatives can be accessed by institutions, communities, learners, and other stakeholders.²⁵⁴ Many Aboriginal stakeholders, however, have been frustrated by the lack of resources available to support on-going information gathering.²⁵⁵ The government could play a strong role in this area, by implementing standards for program data collection, and providing funding and forums for resources and information sharing.²⁵⁶ Exit interviews with students who are leaving university could be an important, cost-effective means of identifying factors that affect student retention.²⁵⁷

Recommendation Thirty-Nine: The provincial government in partnership with Aboriginal peoples must begin to annually audit Aboriginal enrolment, attainment, retention and graduation rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario, and set public goals and objectives for Aboriginal post-secondary attainment.

The provincial government should track the enrolment, attainment, and retention and graduation rates of Aboriginal students each year, and set public goals for raising these rates. Setting public goals is a way of holding the government accountable for providing the necessary support for Aboriginal students to raise post-secondary attainment. To facilitate robust tracking of student participation, persistence and attainment, including being able to capture student mobility across institutions, a unique identifier for each student will be necessary. The on-going implementation of the Ontario Education Number (OEN), a unique student number that tracks students from first contact with the Ontario education system throughout their whole educational and training career, will be necessary to improve current understandings of educational pathways, transitions, participation rates and outcomes.²⁵⁸ Since many Aboriginal students may not immediately enter the Ontario education system, ways of integrating the OEN system with Aboriginal-run primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools should be investigated and implemented where appropriate. In addition, strategies of encouraging self-identification should be investigated to ensure that Aboriginal students are not being underrepresented in provincial data.

Recommendation Forty: The provincial government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and students, should explore improved metrics for measuring Aboriginal success and support universities in implementing institutional changes based on the findings.

The ability to accurately measure and assess the quality of provincial and institutional programs is critical to determining whether Aboriginal student PSE goals have been achieved. Given the difficulties in collecting comparable data at the institutional level

²⁵⁴ Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. (2007). *No Higher Priority Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Communication Canada-Publishing.

²⁵⁵ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (2010). *Promising Practices: Increasing and Supporting Participation for Aboriginal Students in Ontario*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Rae, Bob. (2005). *Ontario a leader in learning: report and recommendations*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

and the lack of data available to measure student success, the provincial government, Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Education Councils, and students must partner to develop metrics to holistically evaluate Aboriginal student success in PSE. Further, these parties must support institutions in developing recommendations and institutional changes based on what is learned from enhanced evaluation.

The approach to evaluation should recognize that student success (not only for Aboriginal students) exists on a continuum that begins while students are in the K-12 system and extends past post-secondary graduation. As is the case, metrics should be established to determine how early outreach initiatives and the student experience during K-12 impact student attainment and success in PSE. Similarly, the entire post-secondary career must be assessed to ensure transitional programs and student support systems are positioned to enhance student success.

As self-identification data and success metrics become more robust and widely available, it should be incorporated into institutions' MYAAs.

Recommendation Forty-One: Institutions should consider implementing the Council of Ontario Universities' self-identification instrument, in consultation with Aboriginal students and AECs. Where self-identification protocols are implemented, institutions should offer training resources to staff, faculty, and student organizations that may find themselves offering support to Aboriginal students.

Following a significant period of consultation, the Council of Ontario Universities established a Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification²⁵⁹ instrument that seeks to overcome the challenges with self-identification, namely cultural insensitivity and fear of misuse of data. This standardized instrument should be implemented at all Ontario universities, enabling them to collect data and reach Aboriginal students. However, where self-identification initiatives are undertaken, it is critical that they be implemented effectively to support students.

Effective implementation of self-identification initiatives includes consultation and involvement of several stakeholder groups including students, student associations, Aboriginal Education Councils, and university faculty and staff. Students must be consulted to ensure self-ID initiatives are relevant and capture the nuance of the community. Student associations, AEC's and university faculty and staff must be engaged to ensure community support for the initiative, the appropriate resources and programs are connected to the initiative, and staff are provided training to support self-ID. Finally, the implementation process should consider how students can change their answer throughout their university career and ensure support resources are available to students who wish to change their response.

Recommendation Forty-Two: The provincial government should develop mechanisms to encourage information sharing and transparency among institutions.

In encouraging institutions to work together to improve Aboriginal student outcomes, the provincial government should utilize a variety of voluntary means in the short-term.

²⁵⁹ COU (2013) *Aboriginal Self-Identification Project: Final Report*. Toronto: COU

Over the long-term when self-identification initiatives develop and metrics are more widely established and reported, the government should move to a more formalized, compulsory reporting system by including Aboriginal student metrics in institutions' MYAA's.

Examples of potential voluntary mechanisms to facilitate information sharing include:

- Incorporating Aboriginal student specific sub-metrics in the Differentiation Framework (student engagement, graduation rates, retention rates, Aboriginal student enrolment);
- Introducing a reporting requirement on Aboriginal student programming, facilitating information exchange on outreach initiatives; Aboriginal pedagogy; integration of Aboriginal culture, programming, and support into the university community.

<i>Recommendation Forty-Three: Oversight over universities should be given to the Ontario Ombudsman.</i>

Students welcome the announcement of a bill aimed at granting oversight of the universities to the Ontario Ombudsman.²⁶⁰ Given barriers to attaining post-secondary education for Aboriginal students and the position of power universities hold over students, increased accountability will ensure students have an additional outlet to raise complaints over fees, academic issues, and complaint processes themselves. The Ontario Ombudsman is a key accountability mechanism for the province and providing jurisdiction over the university sector will ensure fair treatment for students and increased awareness of issues in the sector. Students urge the provincial government to pass this bill, and to ensure greater accountability for students.

²⁶⁰ Ombudsman Ontario (2014) *Ontario Ombudsman Oversight to be expanded to MUSH sector* Available online: <http://www.ombudsman.on.ca/Newsroom/Press-Release/2014/Ontario-Ombudsman-oversight-to-be-expanded-to-MUSH.aspx>

Aboriginal Students Policy Statement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS All students should have access to Aboriginal programming and course content throughout the course of their primary and secondary education;

WHEREAS All students, whether in on or off reserve schools, should be able to access the high school credits necessary to attain post-secondary education;

WHEREAS Aboriginal students should have access to high quality and culturally appropriate guidance in order to assist them in making decisions about their post-secondary pathways;

WHEREAS Early outreach initiatives are important in improving access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students;

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

WHEREAS Band schools are frequently under-funded in comparison to the funding made available to schools funded through the provincial system;

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

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

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

WHEREAS Aboriginal students are not always provided with enough high quality, culturally appropriate advice from their teachers/guidance counsellors on the post-secondary pathways available to them;

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

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

WHEREAS Metis and non-status First Nations must receive adequate financial assistance toward their post-secondary education from the federal and provincial governments;

WHEREAS The increased costs associated with studying at a greater distance from home should not act as an undue barrier for Aboriginal students;

WHEREAS Information on financial aid available to Aboriginal students should be clearly accessible and easy to understand by students;

WHEREAS The administration of financial assistance targeted at Aboriginal students (such as the provincial Aboriginal Bursary fund) must be transparent, easy to understand and accessible to students with need;

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

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

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

WHEREAS Approximately half of all Aboriginal students are mature students, and as such are ineligible for many provincial grant programs, such as the Ontario Tuition Grant (OTG);

WHEREAS Aboriginal students from rural or northern communities may incur higher travel costs;

WHEREAS Information on available financial assistance may not be easily accessible to all Aboriginal students;

WHEREAS The provincial Aboriginal Bursary program reaches relatively few Aboriginal students and does not have the resources to support increased student demand;

WHEREAS The Aboriginal Bursary is often administered inefficiently;

WHEREAS Variability in band policies and allocation timelines may lead to students paying tuition late;

WHEREAS There is a lack of specific funding for non-status and Métis Aboriginal students;

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

WHEREAS Aboriginal student services should be funded sustainably in order to ensure the stability of services offered to students;

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

WHEREAS Funding models and structures for Aboriginal Student Centres vary across the province;

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

WHEREAS University education has the ability to enhance students' labour market outcomes;

WHEREAS Work-integrated learning programs provide high-quality development opportunities for students, enhancing both their understanding of classroom theory and improving their labour market outcomes;

WHEREAS The provincial and federal government and post-secondary institutions have a shared responsibility for helping students overcome barriers to employment;

WHEREAS Aboriginal people have lower levels of employment than the general population and wage gaps exist;

WHEREAS Aboriginal peoples tend to be concentrated in certain fields, and progression within chosen career paths can be limited;

WHEREAS Non-government organizations have taken on a disproportionate level of responsibility for assisting Aboriginal students in finding employment or WIL opportunities;

WHEREAS Government employment programs are general in nature and do not address specific Aboriginal or university student issues;

WHEREAS Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students benefit from post-secondary institutions that incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, values, pedagogy, and language into both classroom instruction and the institution's wider environment in a manner that recognizes the importance of Aboriginal program control and delivery;

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

WHEREAS Ontario's post-secondary institutions should strive to be safer, more welcoming spaces for Aboriginal students;

WHEREAS Many institutions are located on the traditional territories of Aboriginal peoples;

WHEREAS Aboriginal admissions policies can have a positive impact on increasing access for Aboriginal students at institutions;

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

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

WHEREAS There is an underrepresentation of Aboriginal faculty at Ontario's universities;

WHEREAS Even where offered, Aboriginal courses or programs may be over-subscribed or unavailable to interested students;

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

WHEREAS Some students feel that their institutions could be more welcoming towards Aboriginal people;

WHEREAS Institutions often do not make acknowledgement of Aboriginal land claims;

WHEREAS Students have inadequate awareness of Aboriginal admissions policies;

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

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

WHEREAS The data that does exist on Aboriginal attainment often does not include wider metrics to measure Aboriginal success;

WHEREAS Some Aboriginal students may be unwilling to self-identify themselves as Aboriginal and may not be aware of the benefits of self-ID;

WHEREAS There is insufficient transparency and information sharing between institutions;

WHEREAS The Ontario Ombudsman currently has no oversight over universities, meaning Aboriginal students have little recourse for complaints regarding their university experience;

BIRT The provincial and federal governments and post-secondary institutions should take action to raise Aboriginal post-secondary access, participation and attainment rates;

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

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

BIFRT The provincial and federal governments must provide resources to support early outreach programming for Aboriginal students in reserve and non-reserve settings;

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

BIFRT Early outreach programs should be within the control of Aboriginal communities, and tailored to each community's specific needs;

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

BIFRT Ontario's teachers should be required to complete a module on Aboriginal education as part of their training, and school boards should ensure that professional development opportunities on Aboriginal issues are made available;

BIFRT Guidance counsellors should receive regular skills updating on concerns pertaining to Aboriginal students;

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

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

BIFRT The provincial government should expand the Access to Opportunities Strategy by investing in the creation of a new grant program for Aboriginal students;

BIFRT The provincial government should partner with post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal Education Councils to ensure the Aboriginal Bursary is used efficiently;

BIFRT The provincial government should increase funding for the Ontario Distance Grant;

BIFRT Institutions should partner with the provincial government to create strategies to improve the available information on financial assistance available to Aboriginal students;

BIFRT The provincial government should continue to extend OTG eligibility for Aboriginal students to cover their entire time spent attaining an undergraduate post-secondary education, regardless of date of graduation;

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

BIFRT The provincial government should eliminate late fees for all students receiving band funding;

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

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

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

BIFRT The provincial and federal governments must provide funding for culturally appropriate day care culturally appropriate day care services for Aboriginal students with dependants;

BIFRT The provincial and federal government should provide funding for affordable and accessible day care services;

BIFRT The institutions and provincial government should dedicate consistent, annual funding for campus Aboriginal student centres, which should be responsive to enrollment increases;

BIFRT The provincial and federal governments should devote resources towards increasing Aboriginal PSE attainment in order to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes;

BIFRT Government should provide funding to increase WIL opportunities for Aboriginal students, focusing in industries where Aboriginal peoples are underrepresented;

BIFRT Government should facilitate the creation of partnerships between NGOs and post-secondary institutions to support Aboriginal student employment;

BIFRT Government should introduce employment initiatives targeted towards Aboriginal and university and student needs;

BIFRT Investments should be made to increase opportunities for Aboriginal student entrepreneurship;

BIFRT Government should incentivize the creation of Aboriginal focused employment services on campus, or expand services where they currently exist;

BIFRT The federal and provincial governments with universities and Aboriginal stakeholders should take concrete action towards the elimination of racism, providing access to Aboriginal course content, Aboriginal faculty, administrative and support staff;

BIFRT Institutions should provide anti-racist Aboriginal cultural training for administrators, faculty and staff;

BIFRT Institutions should seek to include Aboriginal perspectives in undergraduate curriculum, and ensure that Aboriginal courses or programs have the required number of faculty needed to meet student demand;

BIFRT In order to provide a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal students, institutions should commit to recognizing and incorporating Aboriginal culture on their campuses in a meaningful way;

BIFRT Institutions that are located on traditional territories should commit to recognition of Aboriginal land claims;

BIFRT Admissions policies should be more widely available and included in high level strategic planning;

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

BIFRT The provincial government in partnership with Aboriginal peoples must begin to annually audit Aboriginal enrolment, attainment, retention and graduation rates in all post-secondary education institutions in Ontario, and set public goals and objectives for Aboriginal post-secondary attainment;

BIFRT The provincial government, in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and students, should explore improved metrics for measuring Aboriginal success and support universities in implementing institutional changes based on the findings;

BIFRT Institutions should consider implementing the Council of Ontario Universities self-identification instrument, in consultation with Aboriginal students and AECs. Where

self-identification protocols are implemented, institutions should offer training resources to staff, faculty, and student organizations that may find themselves offering support to Aboriginal students;

BIFRT The provincial government should develop mechanisms to encourage information sharing and transparency among institutions;

BIFRT Oversight over universities should be given to the Ontario Ombudsman.