

SUBJECT: Aboriginal Education Critical to Individual Communities and Provincial Economic Sustainability

SUBMITTED BY: Youth, Education, and Training Committee

BACKGROUND/ISSUE

The statistics are clear and unfortunately not changing very quickly. Aboriginal people graduate high school at approximately half the rate of non-Aboriginals. The number of Aboriginal students at main post-secondary institutions is growing, but the growth is quite slow, and this growth is not properly aligned with the overall population growth statistics.

High School Graduation Rates in Saskatchewan*	
Aboriginal	48.1% (Graduating within 5 years of entering Grade 10)
Non-Aboriginal	81.1% (Graduating within 5 years of entering Grade 10)

* Source: Saskatchewan Plan for Growth

This issue results in a personal loss of income and the ability to care for oneself and family to a level enjoyed by most residents. It means businesses do not have access to work-ready people because they may lack the education and skills required for the jobs that are available. The provincial and federal governments pay the costs of health care, policing and incarceration and do not gain tax revenues from under-employed persons to the same extent as happens with fully employed people.

Since many Aboriginal students go to on-reserve schools which are funded by the federal government, they also face the challenge of school underfunding and the resulting underdeveloped teaching and support services.

There is a discrepancy between the levels of funding that non-reserve (provincially funded) schools receive versus on-reserve (federally funded) schools. This has been disputed by the federal government, but some reports state that it is as high as \$2,000 per student less, but this figure is hard to confirm because funding comes through numerous paths to each school system. However, with lower school populations, remote locations, and greater social issues affecting students, any shortage of financial resources will decrease student success.

Clearly the political rhetoric must stop so that definitive steps can be taken toward improving the situation. There are many training programs offered to Aboriginal people across the province. Many of these create the skills needed by businesses and the student becomes gainfully and sustainably employed. Too many students however, have simply been turned into excuses to run programs which do not lead to meaningful employment. Many of these programs are simply “hamster wheels” that waste money and time. The desire to provide training to Aboriginal people has generated a wide range of programs and while some of them clearly have merit, many do not. This means the dollars

that could otherwise be directed toward the successful programs are wasted on the ineffective ones. A comprehensive review of these programs is required at both levels of government and the program dollars should then be redirected toward those which provide real career success.

RECOMMENDED

1) That the Government of Saskatchewan fulfill its commitment in the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth to reduce the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduation rates by 50% while ensuring that the quality of education remains high.

2) That the Government of Saskatchewan consider all opportunities to assist First Nations schools in terms of support services and consider creating a new arrangement between the First Nations and federal government to better align the collective resources with a shared focus on enhanced student outcomes.

3) That the Government of Saskatchewan and Government of Canada launch an immediate joint review of all post-secondary training programs to evaluate their effectiveness in creating job-ready workers, that their students are able to work and that the value for money meets a higher standard.

4) That the Government of Canada provide adequate and ongoing financial resources in future federal budgets to eliminate the funding gap between on-reserve and off-reserve schools.