

Examining Factors of Success for Aboriginal Students in K-12 Educational Systems in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Yukon

by Ariel Lincez

B.A (Hons., Law and Anthropology), Carleton University, 2011

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Name: Ariel Lincez
Degree: Master of Public Policy
Title: *Examining Factors of Success for Aboriginal Students in K-12 Educational Systems in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Yukon*

Examining Committee: Chair: Doug McArthur
Director

John Richards
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Dominique M. Gross
Supervisor
Professor

Judith Sixsmith
Internal Examiner
Professor

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Abstract

Aboriginal education is a complex system of governance compromises, overlapping jurisdictions and multi-party agreements. The future of Aboriginal education is a dim one at present. Evidence from research has shown educational systems, for the most part, are failing Aboriginal students and creating education disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. To narrow these disparities, the following goals need to be a top priority: increasing academic performance, meeting cultural goals, and improving the management of reserve schools. A review of the literature on Aboriginal education, expert interviews with practitioners working with Aboriginal students in B.C., Saskatchewan and Yukon, were undertaken for this research. The research examines successful innovations, and barriers identified in the literature and noted by interview participants. From this, two policy approaches were identified that could be adopted to mitigate disparities—tripartite agreements and a voluntary incentive-based approach pursued by the federal Aboriginal Affairs ministry where tripartite agreements are inappropriate.

Keywords: Aboriginal education; policy development; successful innovations; barriers; First Nation control over education; Canada.

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List of Acronyms

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
APS	Aboriginal Peoples Survey
ACS	Aboriginal Children Survey
AEEA	Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement
B.C	British Columbia
CCL	Canadian Council for Learning
DRUMS	Data Records and User Management System
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FN	First Nation
FNESC	First Nation Education Steering Committee
FNEA	First Nation Education Act
FNMI	First Nation, Métis and Inuit
FNSA	First Nation School Association
FSA	Foundation Skills Assessment
HAWD	How Are We Doing Report
MOU	Memorandum Of Understanding
NHS	National Household Survey
SA	Saskatchewan
SMDC	School Measures and Data Collection Project
TEFA	Tripartite Education Framework Agreement
THFN	Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation
UFA	Umbrella Final Agreement
YAT	Yukon Achievement Tests

Executive Summary

Improving Aboriginal education has risen to the top of the provincial and national policy agenda. Evidence of this is seen in the tabling of Bill C-33 and in B.C.'s Tripartite Framework agreement. However, Aboriginal education is a complex system of governance compromises, overlapping jurisdictions and multi-party agreements.

According to the 2011 census the share of on-reserve young First Nation adults, ages 20 – 24, who have not attained a high school diploma was 58 percent. Among young First Nation adults living off-reserve the high school incomplete statistic was much smaller, only 30 percent. Grades 8 – 10 are critical transition years for children, and also a time when many Aboriginal students choose to drop out of school.

This study examined the following policy problem: **Previous educational reforms have been too slow and have not reflected quality education because of conflicting interests; thus too many Aboriginal students are not completing their Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.** For this research paper, I developed two research questions: What explains the successes that occur and what are the barriers in schools that students face during their Kindergarten to Grade 12 schooling (K-12)? What system reforms/changes need to occur to help students realize the objectives that parents and teachers want to achieve?

A mixed-methodology approach was chosen. I have tried to strike a balance between using secondary data and literature on the one hand, and undertaking personal discussions*, semi-structured interviews and research collaborations with communities, school boards, band councils, and government officials. However, there is a caveat to

*I met with approximately 10 or more Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders off the record, who either declined participating in the research because of personal or professional reasons or just were consulted for guidance on research design, analysis of research findings, to discuss next steps post-Bill C- 33, or to help me understand the field of education. These individuals also indicated people that I should speak with. These personal discussions were mostly with individuals of Aboriginal identity.

note: all but one of the schools and three individuals involved in this project were located off-reserve in urban provincial schools. I have engaged with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal key informants for feedback, guidance and support throughout the course of this project.

The most significant finding from the research is that multi-pronged innovations have the best potential to enhance Aboriginal success rates. I identified two categories to summarize interview conclusions:

- *Successful Innovations.* These entail incorporation of Aboriginal culture and language in the school; use of evidence-based learning tools (collection of student data, assessment and targeted resources); careful teacher selection; close attention to school leadership, effective school practices and system.
- *Barriers and Challenges to school success.* The factors cited include intergenerational trauma arising from colonization, discrimination, residential schools, poverty and marginalization; underfunding; low retention of good teachers; erratic and bureaucratic federal policies.

The research findings indicate there is an urgent need for education reform. Evidently, a 'one size fits all' model will not work. Moreover, Aboriginal students should not be restricted to Western Eurocentric education.

The study analyzed four policy options: the Status Quo, a legislated First Nation Education Act, a Voluntary Incentive-based approach and Tripartite Agreements. Tripartite agreements and the voluntary incentive-based approach are the two strategies most likely to succeed presently, and should be pursued by policymakers, Aboriginal education leaders, and Aboriginal communities in both public and band-operated schools. Whatever the option pursued, it must include clear and achievable objectives for academic success and cultural goals:

- Pursuit in reserve schools of provincial grade-level performance in either French or English and fluency in a relevant Aboriginal language (as a second language); performance at or above grade level for core subjects such as math and science;
- Aboriginal students are more successful when their culture and traditions are reflected in the curriculum, school, and in classroom instruction;

- Preventing school dropouts is more feasible if a school can engage, support, track, build relationships and connect with the student and family. Attempts should be made to discourage high rates of Aboriginal family mobility during their K-12 schooling because of the adverse effect it can have on student academic success (Turner, and Thompson, 2015);
- Aboriginal stakeholders need to be incorporated into decision-making, and form partnerships with the school, board and/or band council;
- Assessment in the classroom, on teacher proficiency and on programs improves student learning. Key performance indicators need to be developed by Aboriginal stakeholders and AANDC;
- AANDC, provincial governments, or encompassing First Nation organizations should collect adequate data on student performance, disaggregated to the school level, to determine progress and target resources;
- Funding formulas should be pursued that realize, in a workable manner, the goal of per student funding in reserve schools equal to per student funding in a comparable provincial school.

The fundamental conclusion of the study is to pursue a tripartite agreement similar to B.C's or a voluntary incentive-based arrangement. However, better communication and transparency by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)** is a prerequisite for advancing these approaches with individual First Nations.

**For list of all acronyms used in paper please refer to page xii (just before Executive Summary).

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The Majority of Canadians have never seen what passes for schools in isolated First Nations communities, and they do not truly understand the type of environment that has been deemed appropriate for our children. This is a terrible injustice, and it has to come to an end (Ruth Massie, grand Chief, 2011, Council of Yukon First Nations).

Having a high school certificate is a universal necessity to being successful in one's adult years. While high school completion is a low rung on the education ladder, it remains the vital rung for getting a job and avoiding poverty over one's lifetime. Moreover, achieving a modest 'middle class' income, is almost impossible without first attaining some form of post-secondary education (Richards, 2014). Commencing in pre-kindergarten and extending to post-secondary education, Aboriginal¹ students attending a school on- and off-reserve have not been equitably served the same quality education that is afforded to other Canadian students. Since the federal government made it their authority and right to fund and manage First Nation education, there has been an urgent need for educational reform for a system that supports Aboriginal students throughout their education and advances their academic and professional success throughout their lives—this has not yet happened in Canada. Further, in the post-colonial era, Aboriginal students are either not getting their high school diploma, or attaining it at a later age. Therefore, this study examines the following policy problem: Previous educational reforms have been too slow and have not reflected quality education because of

¹ In the project I interchange between using the term Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, or First Nation, Métis, Inuit, to reflect what researchers and interview participants have used when discussing their history or research with me. It is not my place as a researcher to decide which one is more appropriate to use, so for most of the paper I reference what people choose to call themselves, or the research they conducted, or I use Aboriginal as an umbrella term encompassing all Aboriginal groups.

conflicting interests; thus too many Aboriginal students are not completing their Kindergarten to Grade 12 education. Evidence of the slowness of previous reforms is seen in data analyzed in Chapter 3. Consequently, in order to ensure Aboriginal students are successful in school and in their future profession it is pertinent that all levels of government look at adopting policies that improve the current education system and outcomes. For this research paper, I developed two research questions: What explains the successes that occur and what are the barriers in schools that students face during their K-12 schooling? What system reforms/changes need to occur to help students realize the objectives that parents and teachers want to achieve?

For clarity purposes, I will briefly define specific terms in the above-mentioned policy problem. The phrase “previous educational reforms have been too slow and have not reflected quality education” refers to the consistent evidence that has shown educational reforms have failed over the past 30 years. For the context of this paper, “conflicting interests” represents the different beliefs held among the multiple stakeholders at the individual, community, and government level. The phrase “too many Aboriginal students are not completing their K-12 education” represents the observed trends of declining academic performance in core subjects (math, science, writing, reading) and high dropout rates in First Nation schools and public schools (see Chapter 3, and figures 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4).

The scope of this paper is limited to schools and educators working on-or off-reserve, in British Columbia (B.C.), Saskatchewan and Yukon. B.C. was selected because of its superior academic, cultural and other educational outcomes compared to other provinces, and its all-encompassing First Nation education system that has seen incremental improvements. Saskatchewan was selected because of the diverse local agreements that exists across the province and because of the recent research conducted by the University of Regina on developing a model in the province similar to New Zealand’s Te Kotahitanga program. Finally, Yukon was selected because of its differences from the two provinces (e.g., self-governing structure, no band-operated schools, etc.) and because of recent education initiatives and agreements with the Department of Education and Yukon First Nations.

This paper employs the following layout. Chapter 2 provides background to the research paper, and Chapter 3 discusses the observed trends in Aboriginal education data in Canada. Chapter 4 further details the methodology utilized for this project, and Chapter 5 examines the research findings from the semi-structured interviews and connects it with evidence from research findings in the literature. Chapter 6 establishes the criteria and measures used to analyze the four policy options and follows into the analysis of the policies to identify the best approach to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. Chapter 7 establishes the recommended policy options policymakers and First Nation leaders should adopt/pursue. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the research paper's findings and recommendations. The next section discusses contemporary issues and recent attempts at systemic reform.

Chapter 2.

Background: Contemporary Aboriginal Education in Canada

2.1. Recent attempt at reforming the system: Bill C-33

Now is the time to turn the page of past history, time to write the page for a new history.” (Shawn A-in-Chut Atleo, Globe and Mail, 2014)

In 2012, a joint Assembly of First Nations / Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada panel reported on the state of reserve schools across Canada. It described them as a “non-system” lacking “the degree of input, accountability, and democratic governance most Canadians take for granted” (AFN/AANDC, 2012, p. 9). The panel summarized its conclusions in the following passage:

In the early 1970s, following the dissolution of the residential school system, and the devolution of First Nation education to individual First Nations, virtually no thought was given to the necessary supporting structure for the delivery of First Nation education. There was no clear funding policy, no service provision and no legislation, standards or regulations to enshrine and protect the rights of a child to a quality education and to set the education governance and accountability framework. (AFN/AANDC, 2012, p. 9)

Aboriginal education is complex due to overlapping jurisdictions, self-government agreements, numbered treaties and multiple educational agreements made with AANDC and/or provincial ministries of education. There are approximately 500 reserve schools across Canada. They vary significantly in size, language, history and links with provincial schools, or other First Nation schools. Most remain operated and managed by the local band.

There are approximately 1.5 million people who have an Aboriginal identity (National Household Survey (National Household Survey, NHS, 2011)). The Canadian Census defines the Aboriginal population as people who identify as belonging to one of three groups: a First Nation (e.g., Cree, Mohawk, Ojibwa, etc.), Arctic Inuit or Métis. Nearly two thirds of the totals are First Nation, one third Métis and the remaining 5 percent Inuit.

According to the 2011 census the share of on-reserve young First Nation adults, ages 20 – 24, who have not attained a high school diploma was 58 percent. Among young First Nation adults living off-reserve the high school incomplete statistic was much smaller, only 30 percent. The combined First Nation rate was 41 percent. Among young Metis adults living off-reserve the high school incomplete statistics were even smaller, only 20 percent. The comparable incomplete statistic among non-Aboriginals was 10 percent (Richards, 2014).

In 2011, Shawn Atleo, former National Chief of AFN, and Chuck Strahl, the federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister at the time, agreed to a joint panel² to evaluate reserve schools. One agenda item discussed was statutory funding for reserve schools that would be comparable on a per-student basis to the funding provided by provinces for similar provincial schools. The second major agenda item was reform for school organization. The draft legislation, approved by Atleo and by AANDC, was tabled in Parliament in April 2014. Faced with majority opposition among the chiefs, Atleo resigned a month later. The government chose to withdraw Bill C-33, First Nations Control over First Nations Education Act.

John Richards (2014) summarizes the intent of Bill C-33, and the key provisions of the bill: to create a legislative framework that would require First Nations across Canada to ensure unambiguity over the authority for professional management of

² From which the quotes above are taken

reserve schools by the creation of a Joint Council of Education Professionals³ (sub section 10-19 of bill) and enable creation of larger encompassing education associations (ss.27) that enable First Nations councils to delegate powers to a First Nations Education Authority, like the ones in B.C. In Parallel, the bill legislated the principle of comparable per-student to provincial funding levels (ss.43-45) for similar services generally offered in a similarly sized public school that is regulated under provincial legislation and is located in an analogous region (s. 43 [2]), and that would ensure funding supports cultural and language programs (s. 43 [4]).

Barry Anderson and Thomas Fleming (2014) served as consultants to AANDC during the time Bill C-33 was drafted. They criticize Bill C-33 for being essentially a transfer in bureaucratic control from AANDC to First Nations authorities, and having largely ignored what should have been the most important focus of the bill: “improving achievement for Aboriginal students” (Anderson, and Fleming, 2014, p. 2). The two authors recommend comparable principles that exist in Bill C-33. They include (1) commit to match provincial funding levels, (2) provide financial incentives to reserve schools for improved educational outcomes, (3) leave operating control and responsibility for on-reserve education in the hands of the band councils, and (4) help and support bands wanting to aggregate. Anderson and Fleming (p.7-13) recommend that bands establish some clear set of standards and assessments and use them to report publicly school performance. In sum, what is different from the components in the bill is the authors recommend following a non-legislative approach like B.C.’s Tripartite Education Framework agreement.

³ Experts in First Nation education would sit on this council (principals, senior administrators, etc.). On many matters where the Minister could previously make decisions without consultation, Bill C-33 would have made it mandatory that the Minister first seek the advice of the council (Richards, 2014).

2.2. A look at Aboriginal Education in Three Canadian Jurisdictions

2.2.1. Educational Framework and Delivery in British Columbia

B.C has the highest on-reserve high school completion among provinces with large Aboriginal student populations. According to the 2011 census, 60 percent of on-reserve young adults in B.C have completed high school (Statistics Canada, 2006; 2011). B.C also has the second highest high school completion rates, after Quebec, for First Nation adults' off-reserve.

In 2006, B.C. formalized the Education Framework Jurisdiction Agreement with the *First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act 2006*. In 2012, The Minister of AANDC, the Minister of Education for B.C., and the President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), signed the Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA). The agreement aims to provide B.C First Nation students with access to quality education programs whether they attend school on- or off-reserve. First Nations work and run FNESC, which includes approximately 100 First Nation board members. FNESC undertakes research, and represents all First Nations in discussions with government and stakeholders (Fleming, and Anderson 2013). The First Nation School Association (FNSA) represents and works on behalf of 130 First Nation schools that are members of this association. The tripartite agreement is a needs-based funding program. However, limited resources and funding have stalled many programs, and key infrastructural requirements (Fleming, and Anderson 2013).

At least four out of five Aboriginal students (counting Métis as well as First Nation) attend a provincial school in B.C (Richards, et al, 2008). As a result, Aboriginal peoples are also involved with the public provincial school system (e.g., principals, teachers, etc.). In B.C., there are 60 school districts that range in their proportion of enrolled Aboriginal students (see Figure 3.7 in Chapter 3). Victoria's Ministry of Education provides funding that enables school districts to deliver enhanced education programs and services for students who self-identify as Aboriginal. Districts must spend the funds on Aboriginal language and culture programs, support services for Aboriginal students, and other Aboriginal programs approved by the Ministry (Richards, et al,

2008). Victoria's ministry requires that school districts negotiate Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA), which is working agreements made between the B.C education Ministry, school districts and local Aboriginal leaders. B.C requires school districts to identify Aboriginal performance on core competency tests (Foundation Skills Assessment [FSA]). These results are published annually in 'How Are We Doing Reports' (HAWD).

2.2.2. Educational Framework and Delivery in Yukon

Yukon has a special arrangement over education. Education falls under the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA), signed in 1993. Chapter 24 of the UFA stipulates the division and sharing of authority over education between the Yukon Government and Yukon First Nations. There are 14 Yukon First Nations groups, of which 11 have settled land claims and self-government agreements. Within Yukon, 23.1 percent (or 7,705) of the population have an Aboriginal identity (NHS, 2011). Primary responsibility for the administration of the public school education system in Yukon belongs to Yukon Government Department of Education, which manages 28 Yukon schools. The Department's responsibility for education can be found in the *Yukon Education Act*, passed in 1990 and amended in 2002. Yukon collects data on Aboriginal student performance from the Yukon Foundation Skills Assessment, which follows B.C.'s FSA. According to the latest 2013 Yukon Education Annual Report the graduation rate was 47 percent for First Nations youth, which is 11 percentage points lower than the year before.⁴ For non-First Nations youth it was 77 percent. Currently, Yukon's education system is based on the British Columbia curriculum. Through the *Education Act*, the Department is responsible to the Minister, the parents, and the students. The Department collaborates with various groups and organizations to inform its activities, which include, Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Francophone community, and the Yukon Teachers Association. There are no band-run schools in Yukon.

⁴ In Yukon, we see a large decline between 2012 and 2013; however, potentially the decline is due to high variance given small numbers.

To date, no First Nations group has opted to assume full responsibility for education; however, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation (THFN) signed a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) agreement with Yukon Government in 2013, which was the first of its kind in Yukon. It makes the Yukon education ministry and the First Nation partners in the development of curricula and programming in the THFN traditional area.

2.2.3. Educational Framework and Delivery in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan differs in some respects from B.C. and Yukon. For instance, a large number of Aboriginal groups in southern and northern Saskatchewan signed one of the Numbered Treaties (1-7), which has different political and educational implications compared with Aboriginal people in B.C (Carr-Stewart, 2001). This includes the Crown's responsibility to provide both a physical building and teachers to instruct "Indians", and different legal powers and educational policies that are afforded to those under one of the Numbered Treaty. Most B.C First Nations are not part of a Numbered or modern Treaty. The most relevant age cohort in Saskatchewan is the Aboriginal share of the school-age population (ages 5-14 in 2011), which in Saskatchewan was 26 percent. Another important consideration is the Métis population in Saskatchewan. In the city of Saskatoon alone, there were 11,520 Métis people in 2011. According to Steeves, et al, (2011) roughly 25-30 percent of Aboriginal and Northern students receive their high school diploma, in comparison to 70-80 percent of non-Aboriginal students.

In 2013/2014, some encouraging research and agreements have surfaced in Saskatchewan. One project, commissioned by Saskatchewan Ministry of Education conducted research similar to that done in New Zealand's Culture Speaks (Bishop, and Berryman, 2006) project that set out to investigate how to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classroom.⁵ The programme has had successful outcomes in its research and professional development programme that focuses on supporting teachers and works with education leaders and

⁵ Te Kotahitanga is a research and professional development programme that supports teachers, school leaders, and the wider school community to focus on changing school structures and organizations, and to create a culturally responsive context for learning.

the school community.⁶ Saskatchewan Ministry of Education will now be looking at how they could replicate and implement New Zealand's program Te Kotahitanga in Saskatchewan based on their similar research that will be used to pilot a program in a few schools that serve Aboriginal students.

There are many individual agreements between provincial school systems ("public" and "private"), and individual First Nations and tribal councils that all work to promote the success among Aboriginal students. Some noteworthy agreements include the Whitecap Dakota agreement with the Saskatoon Public School Board, MOU tripartite agreement with the Saskatoon Tribal Council (2012), and the Muskeg Lake First Nation agreement with AANDC (2015).

2.3. What Contributes to the Success of Aboriginal Students and Effective K-12 Schooling?

Literature reviewed for this section has been written by authors with different backgrounds and fields. I have purposefully chosen to summarize literature that I thought focused more on best practices and successful innovations.

The following themes were identified and summarized by the author's own interpretation of research findings and arguments presented in the literature.

2.3.1. Funding

Some argue that AANDC funded band-operated schools are underfunded but cannot estimate by how much (Drummond, and Rosenbluth, 2013; Mendelson, 2009). Many organizations, including the AFN, and scholars suggest that funding is not equitable to provincial school funding. In an AFN (2011) survey with approximately 400 or more band-operated schools, funding was identified as the biggest barrier schools face. Bell, et al. (2004) confirmed in all 9 schools researched that inadequate funding remained a critical issue. The authors suggest that to ensure Aboriginal people receive a

⁶ Seeking Their Voices research was prepared in 2014 by SIDRU, University of Regina,

level of education comparable to that provided by provincial authorities, educational grants from AANDC need to be calculated using funding formulas that seek to compare reserve schools with comparable provincial schools (Fleming, and Anderson, 2013; 2014).⁷ Michael Mendelson (2009) argues that more funding is probably necessary, but will not automatically mitigate the disparities in the current non-system of First Nations education. Instead, he suggests the challenge is how to spend effectively⁸; in such a way that leads to sustainable improvements in educational outcomes. Others (Richards, Anderson, forthcoming) argue that it is nearly impossible to find provincial schools to use for comparison with band-operated schools, which are for the most part, small and isolated. There are few provincial schools as small as the typical band-operated school. Anderson and Richards also suggests that AANDC should include more specific spending requirements: require bands to isolate education expenditures from all other band accounts, and fund band-run schools to enable delivery of secondary services at a level similar to that in provincial schools in similar geographical circumstances.

2.3.2. Effective Schools

A significant theme identified in the literature is the importance of effective school-level policies and practices targeting absenteeism, governance, quality school management (Richards, and Scott, 2009; Mendelson, 2008), long-term planning, partnerships and effective classroom variables. According to Bell, et al. (2004), successful schools possessed highly effective governance structures, stable leadership, long-term planning, and models of decision-making in which all parties have the right to veto a proposal and strategic placement of available resources. The study found that proactive measures and policies that address issues of attendance, behaviour and well-being, were found in effective schools in urban areas and on-reserve (Bell, et al, 2004). Richards, Hove and Afolabi (2008) also found similar results, suggesting that effective district policies play a significant political part in forming and sustaining leadership and coordination around Aboriginal education. Holistic approaches were evident in schools

⁷ Sheila Carr-Stewart (2006) and Helen Raham (2009) echo these studies.

⁸ Mendelson defines spending “effectively” as finding “ways to invest more money into First Nations education on-reserve in such a way that the spending has a good chance of resulting in sustainable improvements in educational outcomes” (Mendelson, 2009, p.4).

attempts to meet social, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of students in order to increase their capacity for intellectual development (Bell, et al, 2004).⁹

Fleming and Anderson's (2013) report reinforces the importance of effective school-level policies and practices. One characteristic of an effective school according to the report was staff that demonstrated a caring attitude, maintained order and communicated behavioural expectations. From their research of the literature, they found a strong link between small school size and student achievement, and suggested for practice, school districts should retain smaller schools and build new ones especially in the most impoverished rural and urban communities, break up larger schools into smaller ones, and establish a maximum limit for school size.

Further, Fleming and Anderson (2013) suggest improving school attendance a school must support parents, set out transparent measures of accountability for parents and schools, and collect and compare numbers of attendance rates to establish higher standards. Additionally, the authors recommend schools establish policies that limit the amount of days during the school year a student can miss, and prosecute non-compliant parents in the courts through the imposition of fines or discontinuing child benefits, similar to strategies recently implemented in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

2.3.3. Assessment and Accountability

It is clear from research that establishing an effective accountability and reporting framework to assess student performance is essential (Richards 2014; Raham 2009; 2010; Fleming and Anderson 2013; 2014). Bell, et al (2004) reported schools using a variety of different methods to monitor student progress and program effectiveness; assessment data was then used for student placement, programming and for strategic planning for improvement. Nevertheless, the authors state that outside of school-based assessment data collected, there exists no effective national process that evaluates the education that Aboriginal students are receiving or ensure its quality. Apart from the

⁹ Yatta Kanu (2007) study found that microlevel classroom variables, such as culturally based pedagogy, cannot alone provide an efficient and effective strategy in improving achievement trends among Aboriginal students.

once-in-three years Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, there also does not exist a comprehensive Canada-wide process that evaluates the education non-Aboriginal students receive. The absence of a mandatory large-scale assessment program for band-operated schools inhibits monitoring their progress against common benchmarks (Bell, et al, 2004). This is a result of the hesitancy of band authorities to make it mandatory for their schools to participate in provincial assessment programs or to use standardized tests (White, Peters, and Beavon, 2009). In effect, Aboriginal parents and Canadians at large lack useful and adequate evidence about the relative effectiveness of the various educational delivery systems (Bell, et al, 2004). Raham (2009; 2010) Steeves, et al. (2014), CCL (2007) reinforce these findings.

Fleming and Anderson (2013) find that provincial schools' data collection systems, methods of analysis, and reporting are far from exemplary, due to the slowness (reports are usually not published until January; approximately 6 months after the preceding school year) in getting useful information on student performance, behavioural and learning disabilities and outcomes to schools, families and teachers so that learning and instruction can be continuously improved. They also suggest that key indicators of student and school performance could include achievement measures, enrolment trends, special education incidence levels, attendance, and so on. It is clear that a key characteristic of effective schools research is frequent monitoring of student progress (Fleming, and Anderson, 2013). It is important that Aboriginal communities enunciate a list of high priority outcomes, own the goals and the assessment strategies, and that schools and government are accountable to students, parents and the communities (McCue, 2006). What is key is that both AANDC and Aboriginal leaders discuss their own criteria for "success" and work together towards those goals (Richards, and Anderson, forthcoming).

2.3.4. Engagement and Partnership

A salient requirement for improving the success of Aboriginal students is relations with the community and parents (Spence, White, and Maxim, 2008). Bell, et al (2004) found that schools were effective when they made an effort to bring parents into the school and build trusting relationships with them and the community. This was

important to address and move forward the lingering multi-generational suspicion of schools as instruments of assimilation and eradication of language and culture. Additionally, another dominant factor that seemed to be associated with higher levels of support for education was community ownership of the schools. Richards, Hove and Afolabi (2008) also found that collaborations and shared decision-making between school-districts and local Aboriginal communities was essential to achieve better academic outcomes. The benefit of parent/teacher relationships is also established in Raham's (2009; 2010) papers. When Aboriginal stakeholders are incorporated into decision-making structures, increased student achievement is more likely to be recognized (Steeves, et al, 2014; Moses, 2013).

2.3.5. Language and Literacy

Literacy is arguably the most important foundational skill required for academic success. Raham (2009; 2010) highlights the need for Canadian research on effective approaches to literacy instruction for Aboriginal children and on Aboriginal language programs, and the effects of various models on their literacy and cognitive development. Raham suggests effective approaches that include teaching children to read in their first language, bilingual/immersion instruction, and successful literacy programs in pre-school programming. Moreover, Raham suggests better equipping all teachers of Aboriginal children with the skills and experience of effective literacy strategies, literacy training, and adequate resources. The joint AFN/AANDC National Panel Report (2012) also identifies the importance of learning to read in early years, and reinforcing literacy in the school, the family and the community. They highlight the importance of support for special needs students or those experiencing difficulty learning to read. Jerry P. White (2003) indicates language as being a fundamental cultural right and references it to the idea of nationalism.

2.3.6. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Curriculum

Demmert's research (Demmert, et al 2001; 2003; Demmert, et al, 2006) and McCue (2006) both find culturally responsible pedagogy and curriculum essential to the success of Aboriginal students and systems. Schools studied in Bell, et al, (2004) project

offered an impressive array of instructional and extra-curricular programs, a lot of which were culturally linked and relevant. Additionally, most schools offered cultural classes, visible displays of traditions and culture, special events, and used local resource people (e.g., Elders, language teachers, etc.) who held great wisdom and knowledge of the community. Raham (2009; 2010) suggests that culturally-based instruction, pedagogical approaches compatible with traditional Aboriginal learning styles, and culturally based instruction developed in consultation with the community are relevant to all student achievement.¹⁰ Further, Pamela Rose Toulouse's (2013), a First Nation teacher, argues that the inclusion of Indigenous resources and worldview (i.e., philosophies, traditions, language, etc.) within the curriculum is vital for a meaningful K-12 education for all Canadian students.

2.3.7. Decolonization

The effects of colonization and racism are frequently discussed in literature as a factor hindering the success of Aboriginal students (Schmold, 2011). A Canadian Council of Learning (CCL, 2007) study shows that students and teachers learning about the effects of racism/colonialism supports the improved achievement and positive learning outcomes of Aboriginal students. However, it must be carefully merged into the learning of both teachers and students because it potentially could result in negative learning outcomes. This is reiterated in Fleming and Anderson's (2013) report to AANDC, in which they make the suggestion to lessen the school's institutional framework, and to re-envision band-operated schools as 'community learning centres', that would welcome all children and be open to adults of all ages. They argue that this is a good approach because of the tragic legacy of residential schools and the traumatic effects on First Nations families; communities would pursue "an educational agency that is less authoritarian in manner and less hierarchical in structure than schools conventionally are" (Fleming, and Anderson, 2013, p. 3). Similar important discussions are found in Toulouse's (2013) paper where she argues that systemic racism is foundational to colonialism. Toulouse states that racism is so embedded in societal

¹⁰ These themes have been confirmed in projects such as the joint AFN/ANNDCC panel report (2012), CCL (2007), Richards, Hove and Afolabi (2008), and many more.

institutions that “those with power cannot see it and those without power experience it” (Toulouse, 2013, p.2).

2.3.8. Teachers

A significant amount of educational literature concerning both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning find that teachers matter the most in education—they, along with possibly student peers and parents, have the most impact on students’ learning outcomes. Staff members at the schools involved in Sharing our Success (Bell, et al, 2004) project were committed to ongoing improvement through continuous professional development and research. The recruitment, training and retention of up to an 85 percent certified and Aboriginal staff from their own communities was found to be a source of considerable pride (Bell, et al, 2004). However, the authors acknowledge that there is a serious shortage of certified Aboriginal teachers, especially those with experience in early childhood development, an Aboriginal language, special education, reading, and science or mathematics specialties at the high school level (Kitchen, et al., 2009). This issue is presented again in Raham’s (2009; 2010) papers, where she argues that both governments and school districts must find new solutions to address teacher recruitment and retention for schools serving Aboriginal students. Raham also proposes that policies should support mentoring programs for new teachers in Aboriginal classrooms, credentialing in First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education (FNMI) language and culture should be expanded to create an adequate supply of skilled teachers. Investing in professional development is essential to increasing and maintaining teacher skills, especially in less successful schools (Raham, 2009; 2010).

The researchers of the Seeking Their Voices (Steeves, et al, 2014) report found that it is important for educators to have high expectations, personal connection and support with students, cultural knowledge and awareness of students and community, sharing power and being active with the students, and being flexible and accommodating (MacIver, 2012). Richards, Hove and Afolabi (2008) study also shows the importance of commitments made by school-level administrators and teachers in improving relations with Aboriginal families and community members. Fleming and Anderson (2013) suggest that among school-level factors, teachers matter most in student performance,

and that this is something that policy could have an easier time changing, compared to such things as student and/or family circumstances. Nonetheless, studies argue quite convincingly, that it has been challenging finding and retaining high quality teachers, because of the inability to match provincial salaries, high recruitment costs, inadequate training and professional development (Bishop, 2010), and physical isolation (many on-reserve schools are).

Chapter 3.

Trends in Aboriginal Education data

The available data in Canada are important indicators of Aboriginal performance and learning, population, and socio-economic factors.

3.1. National Household Survey, Educational Attainment, Canadian Census (2011)

Nationwide statistics from the National Household Survey (NHS) (2011) offer a glimpse into the academic performance of provincial school systems and reserve schools. The census does not provide the location of schooling, and participation was voluntary. Therefore, NHS data will not provide a level of quality or response rate that would have been achieved through the former mandatory long-form census. Nonetheless, the NHS is the only adequate national data source available that provides comparable interprovincial information on how Aboriginal students are doing.

Using the NHS results, Figure 3.1 illustrates the percentage among four age cohorts – ranging from ages 20-24 to 45 and over – with high school certification or higher education level. The older cohorts are important because they capture students who attained a high school diploma after K-12 schooling. Those in the oldest cohort illustrated were born prior to 1965, and all but a few in this cohort can be expected to have completed high school (if they did complete) before 1980. Even within the non-Aboriginal population, more than one in five (21.6 percent) of those in the oldest cohort did not graduate. Among the three younger non-Aboriginal cohorts, the completed high school or above statistic is only 10 percentage points shy of 100 percent, demonstrating that, for working-age Canadian adults, near-universal high-school completion has become the norm (Richards, 2014).

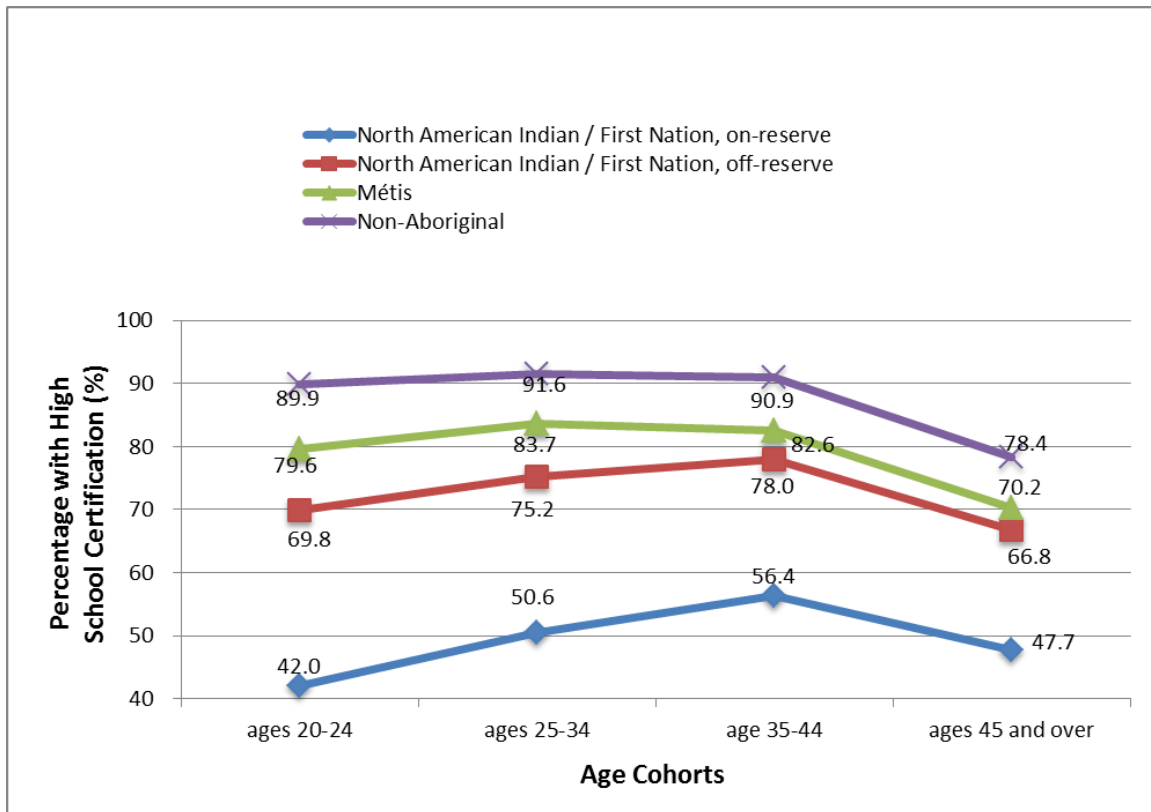
Among Métis, a similar inter-cohort profile exists, although it lies below that for non-Aboriginals. The gap between the two profiles is roughly 10 percentage points for all age cohorts. As measured by this gap, Métis high-school completion, while not converging on that for non-Aboriginals, has kept pace with the rise in high-school completion among younger Canadians overall.

As with Métis relative to non-Aboriginals, the rates for First Nation who completed high school or above are about 10 percentage points lower for those aged 35-44 than for those aged 45 and older. The on-reserve First Nations is the only group for which the high school completion rate among young adults aged 20-24 is lower than for the 45-and-older cohort. The older cohort encompasses no doubt a majority of the parents or guardians of the younger cohort.

Meanwhile, some convergence in outcomes between the three First Nation cohorts and non-Aboriginals is taking place between ages 25 and 44. Based on the profile for all First Nation, about 60 percent in the 20-24 cohort have completed high school; among the 35-44 cohort, some 70 percent have done so (Richards, 2014)

For cohorts between ages 25 and 44 the NHS shows convergence and Métis cohorts. It is a different story for First Nations on-reserve cohorts. It is clear that many on-reserve First Nations adults are not finishing high school, if they do finish, until middle age. Finishing high school at a younger age is essential, if they are to have more options as young adults.

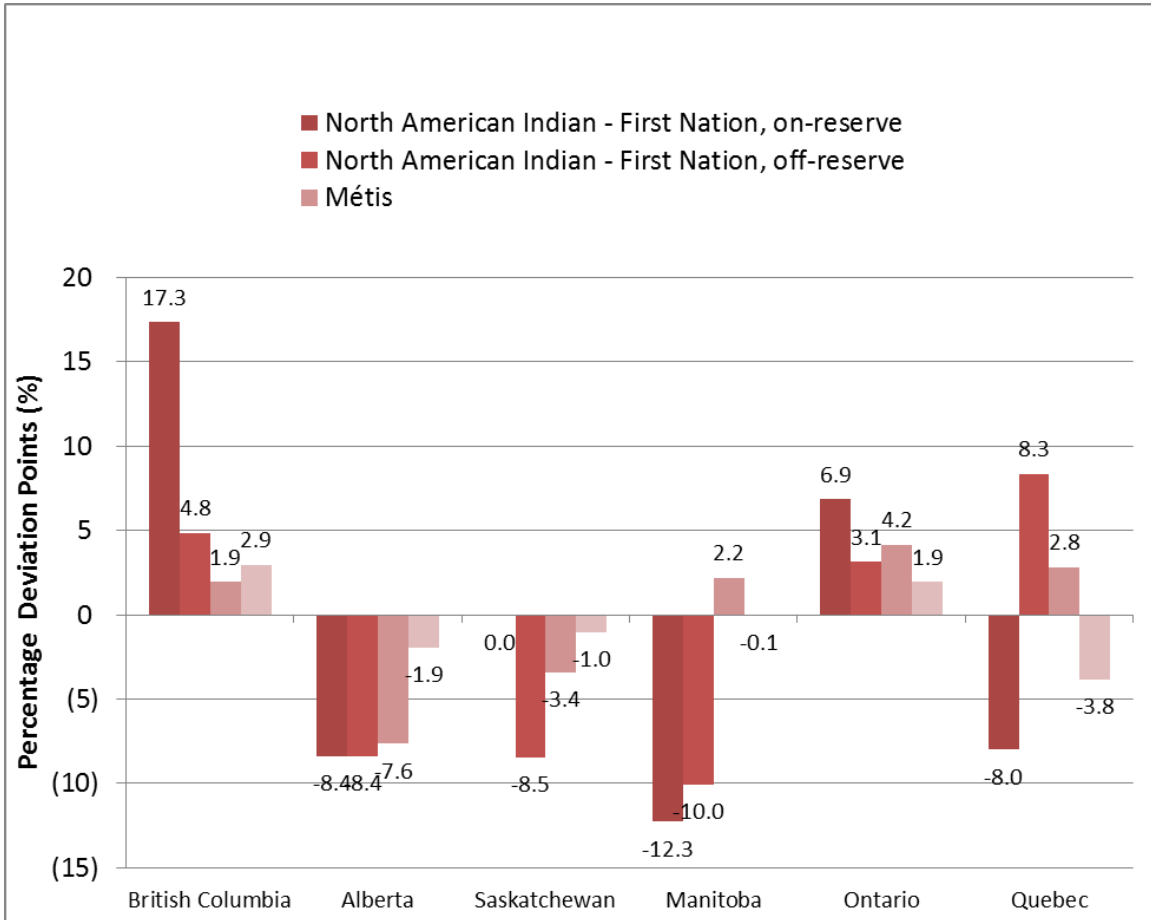
Figure 3.1. Share with High School Certification or Above, Selected Aboriginal Identity Groups and Non-Aboriginals, by Selected Age Cohorts, 2011



Source: Richards (2014)

3.1.1. Provincial Differences

Figure 3.2. Provincial Deviations from respective Canadian Average Identity Group Share with at least High School Certification, Ages 20-24, by Selected Provinces, 2011



Source: Richards (2014)

National averages hide some large provincial differences. For the six provinces from Quebec to British Columbia – home to almost 90 percent of Canada’s Aboriginal population – provincial deviations from the relevant national averages, at ages 20-24 highlight important information (Richards, 2014) (Figure 3.2). In Richards (2014) he highlights the importance of the range of school age cohorts (ages 5-14 in 2011 NHS) in the provinces. For instance, Figure 7 in commentary 408 (p.11) shows Manitoba and Saskatchewan Aboriginal share at both 26 percent; exceeding a quarter, double the rate in Alberta and B.C., and seven times the average east of Manitoba.

Positive deviations from the Canadian average of those with a high school certificate imply superior performance relative to the national average, (while negative deviations suggest inferior outcomes). The largest interprovincial range is within the on-reserve Indian/FN population, at nearly 30 percentage points. In Manitoba, the incomplete rate is 12.3 points below the national average (58.0 percent); the B.C rate is 17.3 points above the national average. The Métis interprovincial range is much smaller, slightly less than 12 points. The Alberta rate for Métis who lack a high-school graduation certificate is 7.6 points below the national average; the Ontario average is 4.2 points above it. Outcomes in British Columbia and Ontario are uniformly better than the national average for all five identity groups; in the Prairie Provinces they are generally worse. Outcomes in Quebec are mixed: worse than average for Indian/FN on-reserve, better than average for Indian/FN off-reserve (Richards, 2014).

3.2. Student Performance Data

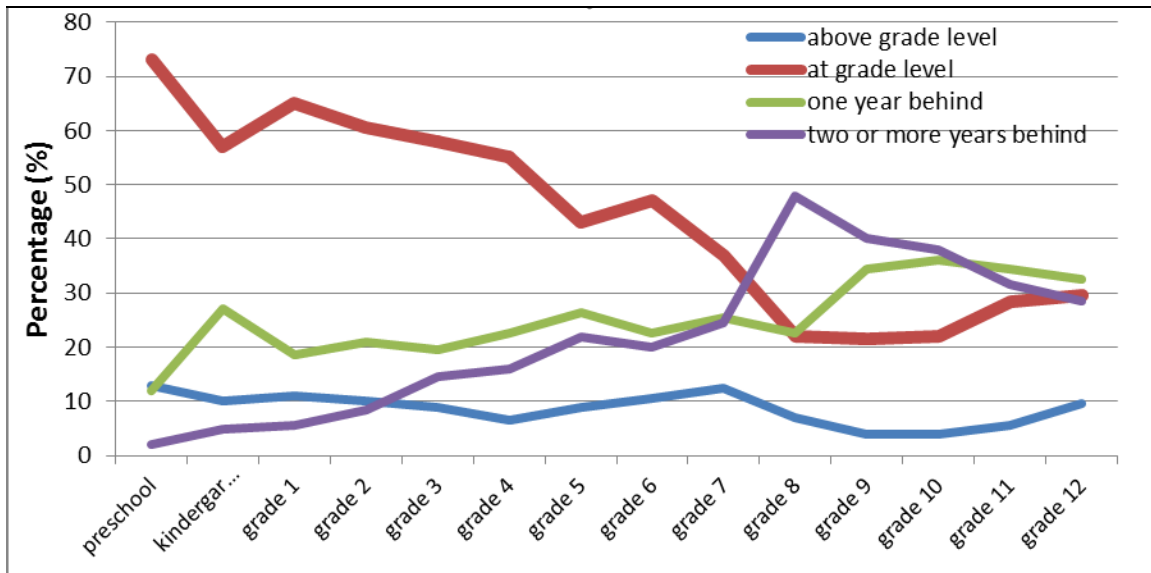
3.2.1. Band-Operated Data on Student Performance, First Nations School Association Data, B.C

The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) is a non-partisan organization that works with First Nations schools in B.C. Now in its eighth year, the FNSA School Measures and Data Collection Project (SMDC) include surveys of schools, students and parents. As a result of the development of a B.C First Nation schools Data Records and User Management System (DRUMS), in the future school data will be collected from all schools on an annual basis, replacing the current project. The year illustrated, 2011/12, is the final year for the School Measures and Data Collection Project. It is anticipated that collection of data through DRUMS will streamline the collection activities, simplify the process for schools and create a comprehensive source of information valuable for planning at the school and system levels. DRUMS, unlike the SMDC Project, will not be accessible to the public.

For the 2011/2012 year, 62 First Nations schools returned school forms (48% of the total).45 submitted K-12 school forms; 10 submitted the Nursery/Kindergarten forms,

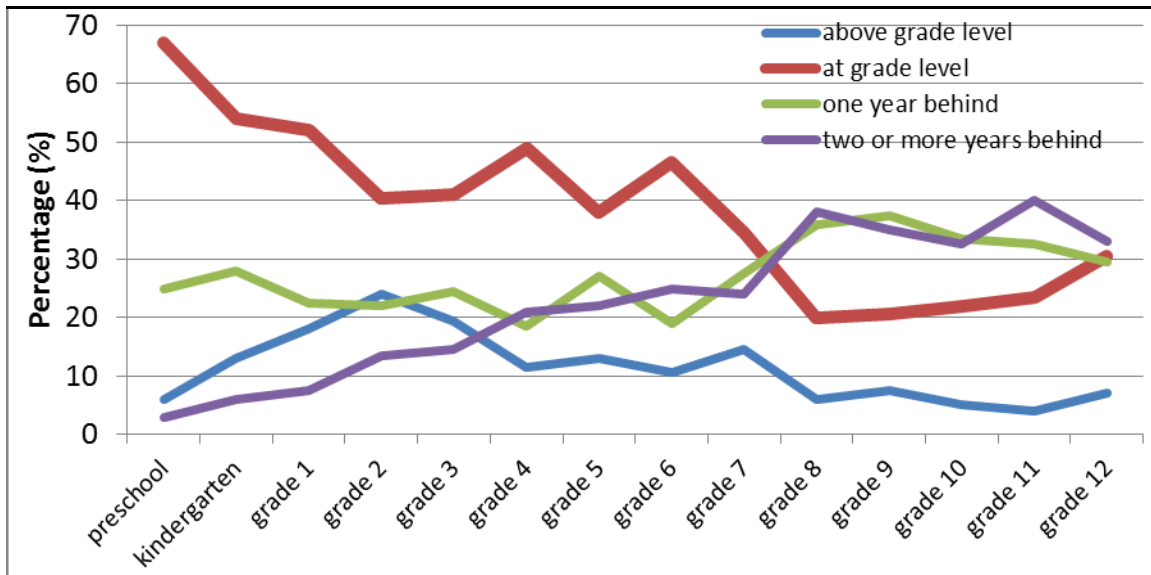
and 7 Adult Centres responded. As well, 1157 students and 639 parents completed surveys that were distributed as a part of the project (FNSA, SMDC Project, 2011/2012).

Figure 3.3. Distribution of Student Performance in Mathematics, Reserve Schools in BC, Average 2010/11 and 2011/12



Source: Tindall Consulting Author's calculation First Nations School Association (FNSA). 2012. School Measures and Data Collection Project 2010/2011 and 2011/12

Figure 3.4. Distribution of Student Performance in Reading, Reserve Schools in BC, Average 2010/11 and 2011/12



Source: Tindall Consulting Author's calculation First Nations School Association (FNSA). 2012. School Measures and Data Collection Project 2010/2011 and 2011/12.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 show average 2010/11 and 2011/12 student performance in reading and math for on-reserve schools in B.C. The majority of children before Grade 7 are performing at or above grade level in reading and math. However, the pattern is one of declining performance until Grade 8. Thereafter, there appears to be some improvement in the proportion of students working at grade level. However, after grade 8, the majority of students are one to two years behind grade level. This trend for reading seems to continue until Grade 10/11. We see the largest increase of performance in Grade 12. For math, we can see a flat trend from Grade 8 to Grade 10, when the pattern changes to one of increasing performance up to Grade 11/12. It is not clear from the data why average performance is somewhat better in later grades. It seems that Grades 8 – 10 are critical transition years for children, and also a time when many students choose to drop out of school. Richards and Scott (2009) in their study examine FNSA performance data from 2009. They conclude that the improvement in performance in higher grades likely signifies the exit of low-performing students.

Dropout rates and the declining performance trend could likely be reduced by integrating Aboriginal Specific Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs and literacy

programs for those falling behind grade level (Richards, and Scott, 2009; Raham, 2009; 2010). However, Aboriginal Specific ECE programs might not be enough. Strategies to combat absenteeism and increased secondary services could also help.

3.3. How Are We Doing (HAWD)? B.C., Foundation Skills Assessment Data on Aboriginal Students in the Provincial System

Table 3.1. British Columbia Grade 4 Academic Performance

British Columbia Grade 4 Academic Performance - Students Meeting and Exceeding Expectations (%)						
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	Average
Reading Performance						
AB	53	52	54	58	54	54.2
Non-AB	67	68	68	71	70	68.8
Reading Performance Gap	-14	-16	-14	-13	-16	-14.6
Writing Performance						
AB	55	56	54	58	53	55.2
Non-AB	68	73	72	74	71	71.6
Writing Performance Gap	-13	-17	-18	-16	-18	-16.4
Numeracy Performance						
AB	45	47	50	48	46	47.2
Non-AB	64	66	69	68	68	67
Numeracy Performance Gap	-19	-19	-19	-20	-22	-19.8

Source: HAWD? B.C., Foundation Skills Assessment Data on Aboriginal Students

Table 3.2. British Columbia Grade 7 Academic Performance

British Columbia Grade 7 Academic Performance - Students Meeting and Exceeding Expectations (%)						
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	Average
Reading Performance						
AB	47	49	46	49	49	48
Non-AB	64	66	64	66	66	65.2
Reading Performance Gap	-17	-17	-18	-17	-17	-17.2
Writing Performance						
AB	50	57	53	55	53	53.6
Non-AB	68	73	72	72	71	71.2
Writing Performance Gap	-18	-16	-19	-17	-18	-17.6
Numeracy Performance						
AB	39	39	36	40	38	38.4
Non-AB	63	63	60	64	63	62.6
Numeracy Performance Gap	-24	-24	-24	-24	-25	-24.2

Source: HAWD? B.C., Foundation Skills Assessment Data on Aboriginal Students

Literacy is arguably the most important foundation skill to acquire in K-12 education. Although provincial data cannot be accurately compared to band-operated school performance data, they do present a picture for Aboriginal students in provincial schools. Most of these students live off-reserve, but about one fifth are on-reserve students attending a provincial school. The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests reading, writing, and numeracy levels for Grades 4 and 7. Students' performance is categorized by "unknown, not meeting expectations, meeting expectations and exceeding expectations". Tables 3.1 and 3.2 display the combined "meeting and exceeding percentages" from 2009/2010-2013/2014 for Grades 4 and 7. Based on the average for the 5 years, it is clear that for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the pattern are one of declining performance in reading and numeracy between Grades 4 and 7. Further, it is evident that there exists a gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students at both grade levels and in all three skill areas. Between Grades 4 and 7 the average performance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in each skill area increases; 1.2 percentage points for writing, 2.6 points for reading, and 4.4 points for numeracy.

While a gap exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student performance, B.C. has seen much improvement. There is a narrowing of the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students over the last 13 years in B.C (Anderson, and Fleming, 2014, p.16). Furthermore, “on-reserve schools are participants in these changes because their students frequently move into public school secondary programs” (Anderson, and Fleming, 2014 p. 16).

3.3.1. Saskatchewan Performance Data

Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Education reports performance data on core subjects (math, writing and reading) for Grades 5, 8 and 11. The most current report (see Table 3.3) was published in 2011, and did not report on individual Grade levels, but instead aggregated all earlier Grades into “Elementary” and higher Grades into “Middle Years”. Additionally, the 2011 report only shows data for math and reading; writing was omitted. There exists a larger Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal performance gap in numeracy and reading for all school levels than in B.C. In ‘Numeracy Application and Problem Solving Skills’, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students decline in performance from elementary to middle years. The same trend can be seen for ‘Reader Response’. For ‘Numeracy Content Skills’ and ‘Reading Comprehension Skills’, there is not much change as students’ progress to middle years. Based on the observed trends, improving access to secondary services, and tutoring for numeracy and reading comprehension for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students might be important to improve the share of students performing “at or above expectations”.

Table 3.3. Saskatchewan Elementary and Middle Years Academic Performance

Saskatchewan Elementary and Middle Years Academic Performance - Students Meeting and Exceeding Expectations (%)		
	2011 Elementary	2011 Middle Years
Reading Comprehension Skills		
AB	57	63
Non-AB	85	86
Reading Comprehension Performance Gap	-28	-23
Reader Response		
AB	77	41
Non-AB	89	61
Reader Response Performance Gap	-12	-20
Numeracy Content Skills		
AB	44	43
Non-AB	77	74
Numeracy Content Performance Gap	-33	-31
Numeracy Application and Problem Solving Skills		
AB	46	20
Non-AB	74	46
Numeracy Application and Problem Solving Performance Gap	-28	-26

Source: Saskatchewan Indicators Education Report Brief, 2011

3.3.2. Yukon Education Annual Report and Performance Data

Table 3.4 below is an extract of data from Yukon’s Education Annual Report for performance in numeracy and reading for First Nation and non-First Nation students. The Yukon Achievement Tests (YAT) are now following the B.C. based FSA rather than the previous Alberta-based Achievement Tests format. The performance gap is quite narrow at Grade 4. This is similar to B.C. results and is positive news. This could be an indication to when intervention is needed to prevent further increases in the performance gap. However, the gap for reading at Grade 7 is much larger. The gap for performance in numeracy and writing for First Nation students meeting expectations is quite large in both Grades 4 and 7. Based on the observed trends, improving access to secondary services, and tutoring for numeracy, writing and reading for Aboriginal students might be

important. For both Saskatchewan and Yukon, one year's worth of data can only be suggestive.

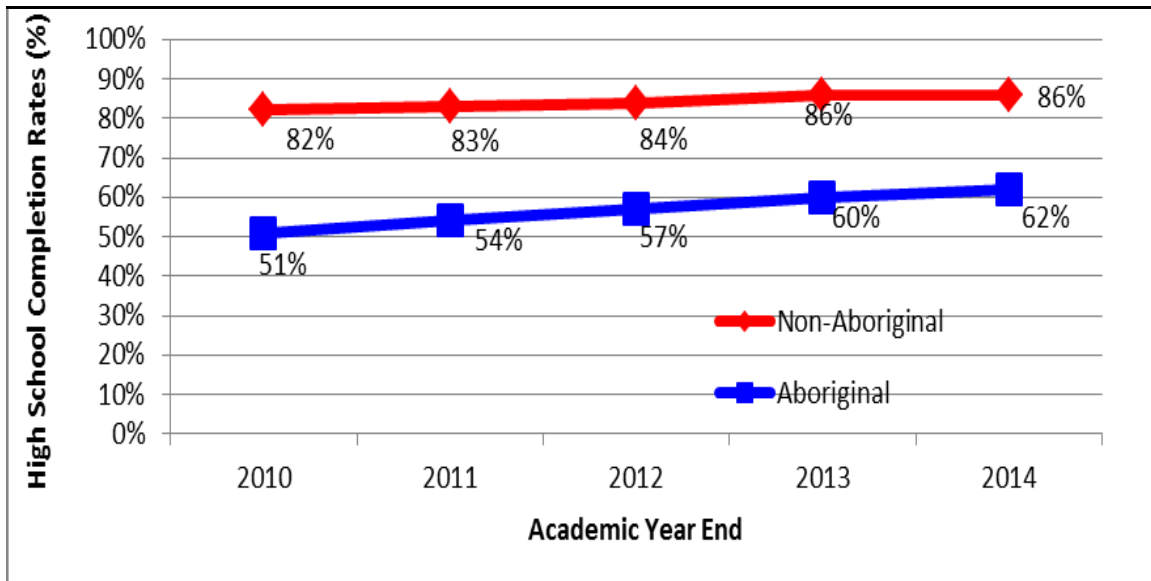
Table 3.4. Yukon Grades 4 and 7 Academic Performance

Yukon Grades 4 and 7 Academic Performance - Students Meeting and Exceeding Expectations (%)		
	2013/2014 Grade 4	2013/2014 Grade 7
Reading Performance		
AB	62	48
Non-AB	78	78
Reading Performance Gap	-16	-30
Writing Performance		
AB	48	41
Non-AB	67	68
Writing Performance Gap	-19	-27
Numeracy Performance		
AB	50	44
Non-AB	76	74
Numeracy Performance Gap	-26	-30

Source: Yukon Education Annual Report 2013

3.4. How Are We Doing (HAWD)? B.C. Data on Aboriginal Students in the Provincial System

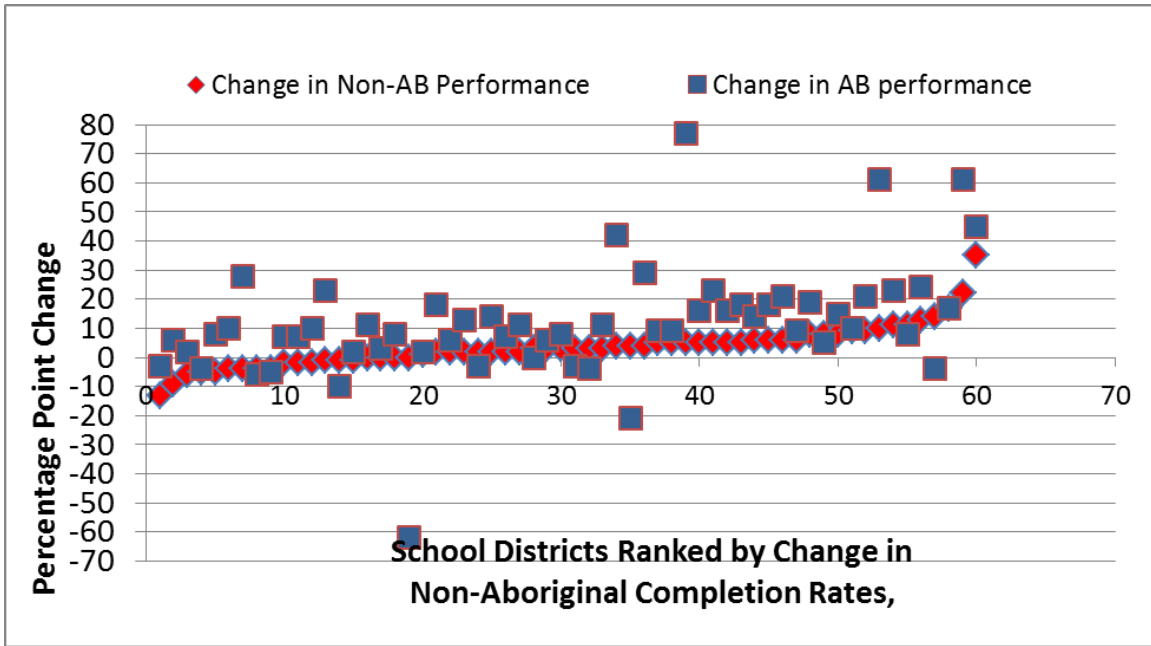
Figure 3.5. Provincial High School Completion Rates 2010-2014, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal



Source: Author's calculation from How Are We Doing, B.C., Ministry of Education Aboriginal Performance data. Note these are "six year completion rates" inasmuch as they record the percentage of students who enter grade eight who graduate with a dogwood certificate within six years.

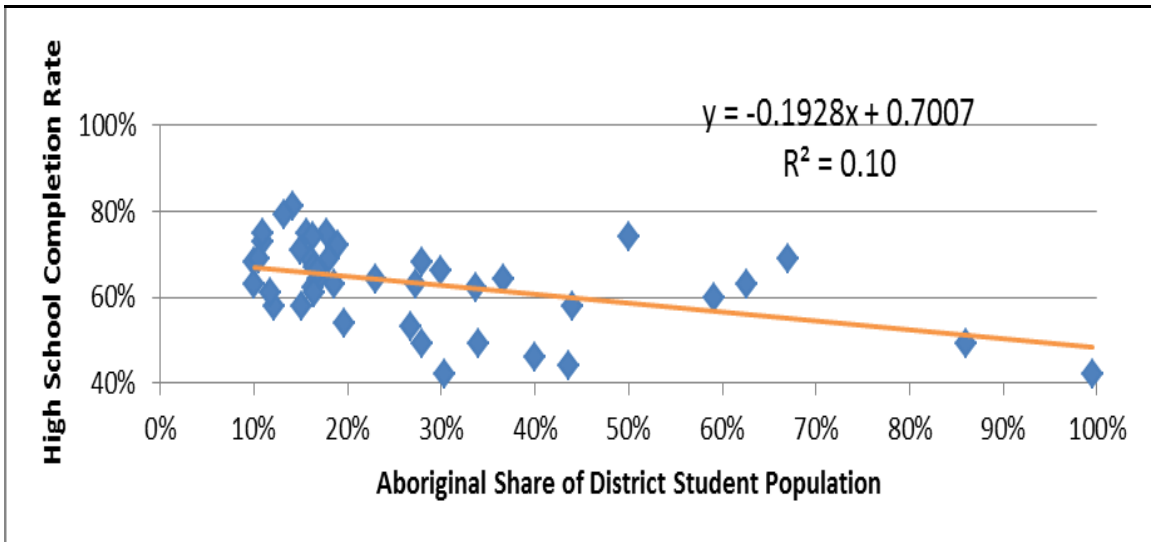
B.C. is an example of slow positive improvements in Aboriginal high school completion rates (see Figure 3.5). Provincial data hide important differences among the 60 school districts in B.C. Figure 3.6 illustrates the percentage point change from 2009/2010-2013/2014 for high school completion rates of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students, by school district. It is evident that there exists, on average, an increase in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal high school completion rates, and that the average increase in high school completion rates among Aboriginal students has been superior to that among non-Aboriginal students.

Figure 3.6. Change in Completion Rates in B.C Public Schools, 2009/2010-2013/2014



Source: Author's calculation from How Are We Doing, B.C., Ministry of Education Aboriginal Performance data.

Figure 3.7. Aboriginal High School Completion Rate, by School District and Share of Aboriginals in District Student Population



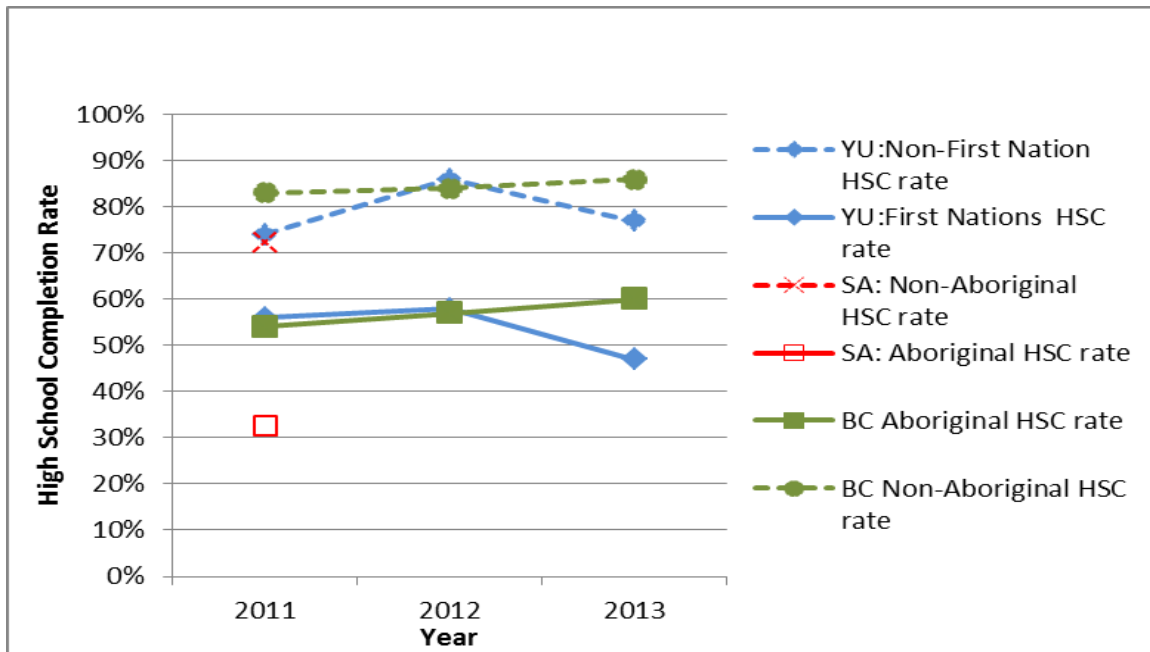
Source: Author's calculation from How Are We Doing, B.C., Ministry of Education Aboriginal Performance data.

Figure 3.7 illustrates district completion rates against the percentage of Aboriginal students among students. For 2013/2014, a higher proportion of Aboriginal students in a school district is associated with a lower high school completion rate for Aboriginal students. Jane Friesen (2009) concludes that Aboriginal student peer effects have a direct positive impact on student performance within a class. However, she uses a school fixed effect, which prevents comparison across schools with different shares of Aboriginal students or at the school district level. At the district level in 2013/2014, there is a negative correlation between the Aboriginal student share and high school completion rate. Many factors in addition to Aboriginal student share are relevant in this discussion but, after allowing for them, there exists probably a negative peer effect.

3.5. High School Completion Rates from 2011-2013 in B.C., Saskatchewan and Yukon

3.5.1. Interprovincial Data on Graduation Rates

Figure 3.8. High School Completion Rates



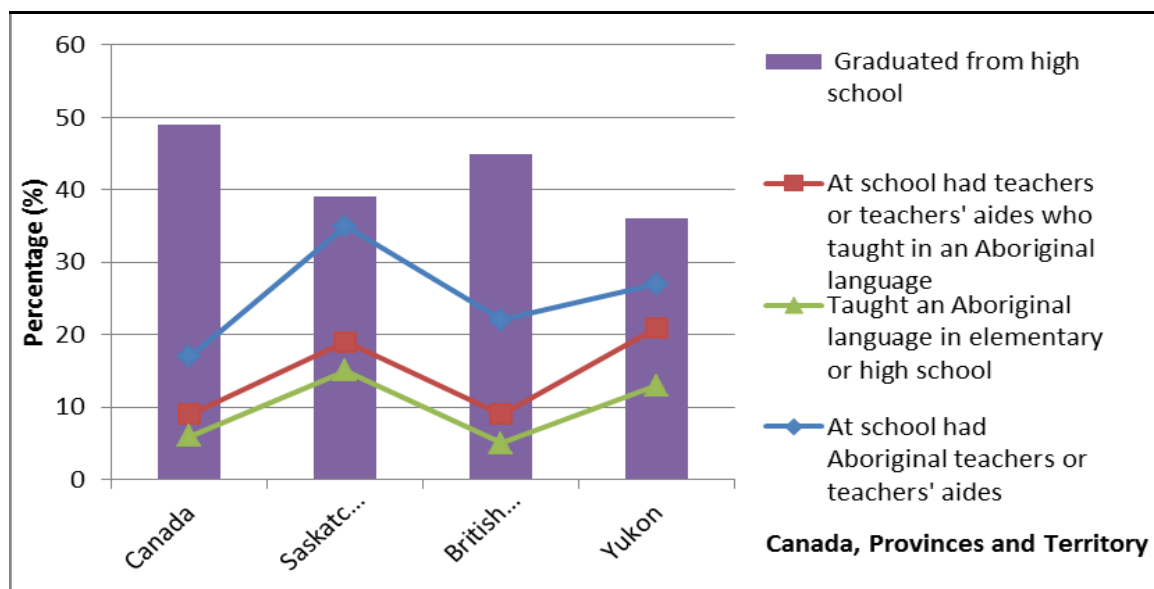
Note: There are no Saskatchewan data available for high school completion after 2011. Saskatchewan uses a 3-year rate, defined in terms of those entering grade 10. The other provinces use a 6-year HS calculation, defined in terms of those entering grade 8 and completing in six years. Only Yukon collects data explicitly for First Nation students, as opposed to other Aboriginals. Source: Ministries of Education; Saskatchewan 2011 Indicator Program Report, Yukon 2011,2012,2013 Education Analysis Report, and B.C., 2010,2011, 2013 How Are We Doing Report.

Figure 3.8 compares high school graduation rates among the three jurisdictions. Saskatchewan’s three-year calculation inflates the Saskatchewan result relative to B.C and Yukon because it ignores those who drop out in Grades 8 and 9. However, B.C and Yukon allow for one year grade repetition, which Saskatchewan does not. The difference means that a true comparison is difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, Saskatchewan has not published a report since their 2010/2011 education indicator report. As I have previously noted, there is a slow positive upward trend in B.C for Aboriginal student completion in the provincial school system. B.C. also collects the most comprehensive Aboriginal student data. In Yukon, we see a large decline between 2012 and 2013;

however, potentially the decline is due to high variance given small numbers. In Saskatchewan because we only have 2011 data, all that can be observed is the significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal completion rates. Differences in calculating provincial graduate rates illustrate why the census data, calculated on a consistent national basis, are important.

3.6. APS and ACS (2006)

Figure 3.9. Aboriginal Culture for Provincial Elementary School or High School

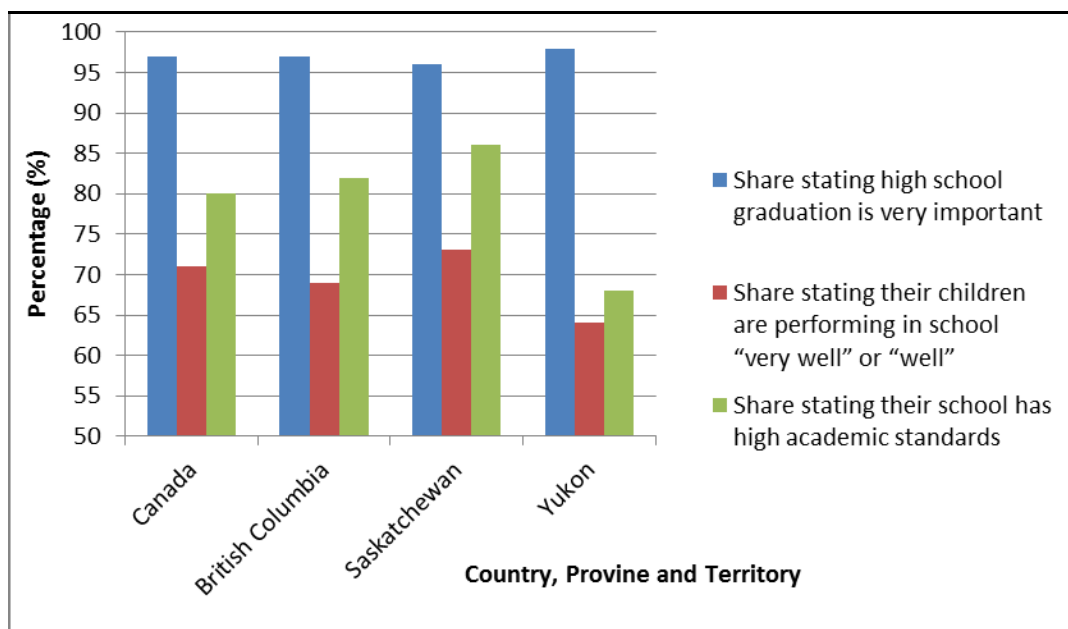


Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006. The online product 2006 Profile of Aboriginal Children, Youth and Adults provides an extensive set of data about Aboriginal children, youth and adults (Métis, Inuit and off-reserve First Nation) living in urban, rural and northern locations across Canada.

Teaching about Aboriginal culture and language and having Aboriginal teachers on staff support can advance the learning and success of Aboriginal students. Many researchers have reached this conclusion, but they also advocate the importance of good quality teachers, effective school policies and accountability (Demmert, 2001; Demmert, et al, 2006). Figure 3.9 illustrates the complexity of the issue. More use of Aboriginal language in school and the more Aboriginal teachers and aides do not necessarily increase the high school graduation rate. Saskatchewan and Yukon have graduation rates below B.C and the national average. As suggested in the Kanu's

(2007) study, what might be as important as integrating Aboriginal culture into classrooms are structural variables such as absenteeism and dropout rates among Aboriginal students.

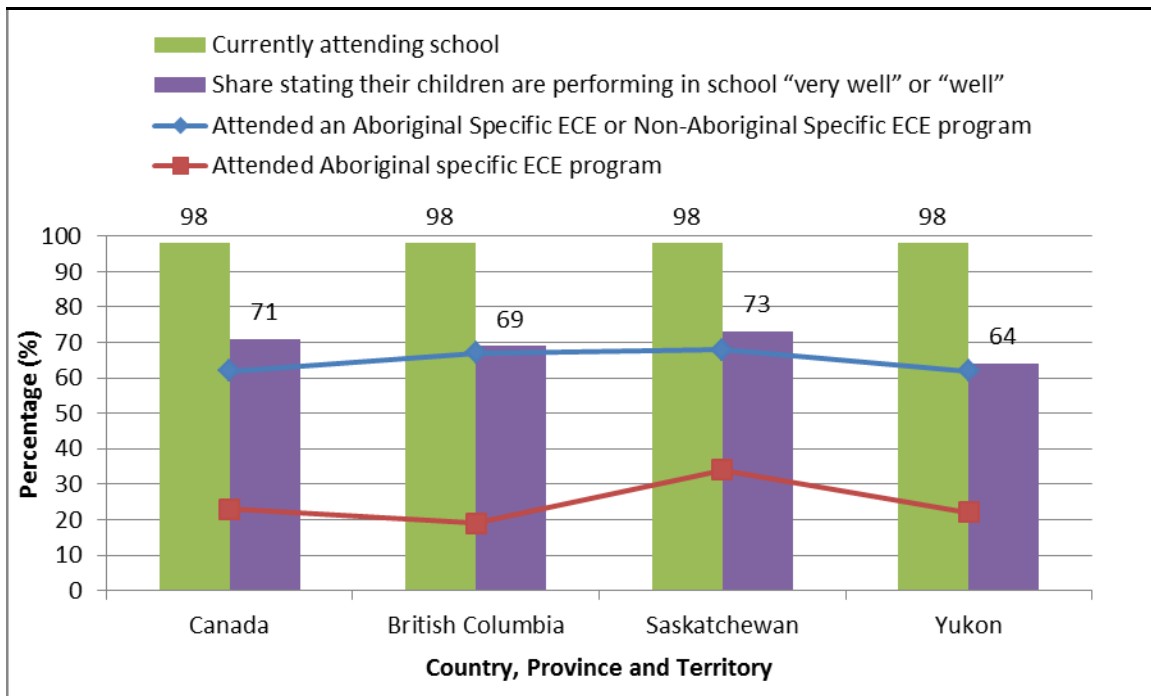
Figure 3.10. Parents' or Guardians' Views of Performance and Academic Standards of their Children and School



Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

Uniformly, over 95 percent of Aboriginal parents feel it is very important that their children graduate from high school (Figure 3.10). However, a sizeable minority of parents/guardians – particularly in Yukon – have limited confidence that their children’s school has high standards. This judgment is positively correlated with evaluations of how their children are faring in school. The more parents believe the school is perceived to have high standards the more likely they are to report their children doing very well or well in school. This reflects the abundance of research that stresses the importance of schools having high academic expectations of their students (Steeves, et al, 2014; Fleming and Anderson, 2013; 2014; Bell et al, 2004).

Figure 3.11 Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Currently Attending School



Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006.

Figure 3.11 shows a modest positive relation between the percent of students who had attended an Early Childhood Education (ECE) or preschool program and parent/guardian’s evaluation of student performance at school. This is most notable in Saskatchewan where a higher percentage of Aboriginal students attending an ECE has resulted in more families stating their children are performing well or very well at school.

3.7. Data are Important but Don’t Explain it All...

Many critique the new voluntary census as being inadequate compared to the mandatory long form census because the Aboriginal population sample is probably not random. The census also does not provide geographical location of students’ schools. To make data useful for practical purposes, data should be available quickly. Additionally, most data only show outcomes for Aboriginal students in the provincial

systems; they do not account for students who drop out of school, and do not measure important aspects of culture.

In sum, nationwide and provincial data are far from perfect, but they provide a decent representation of the Aboriginal student population. We can see that, overall, Aboriginal students' academic performance is improving but as the paper's policy problem states it is occurring too slowly. Furthermore, it is very important that those collecting data routinely disaggregate data for Aboriginal students so that school boards, districts and governments can target resources accordingly. Overall, data are important but the views of educators, Aboriginal communities, and families must be incorporated to create a fuller picture and to ensure further progress.

Chapter 4.

Methodology

Over one academic year (i.e., September-April), I conducted an inductive graduate-level study on Aboriginal Education. The study was primarily based in B.C., but also included travel to Saskatchewan and data collected from Yukon through contacts and collaborators. In order to better understand the social, economic, and political realities that impact Aboriginal youth in educational systems in Canada a mixed-methodology approach consisting of a literature review, descriptive statistics from second analysis of survey data and interviews was undertaken. I also developed two research questions: What explains the successes that occur and what are the barriers in schools that students face during their K-12 schooling? What system reforms/changes need to occur to help students realize the objectives that parents and teachers want to achieve?

Demmert and McCardle (2006) suggest a mixed methodology approach for exploratory research on Indigenous education. They state that researchers must be able to consider Aboriginal student education from various perspectives (e.g., the classroom, school, community, etc.), undertake participatory research with Aboriginal participants and collaborators, and involve and engage with universities, communities and/or authorities that represent the community.

I have tried to strike a balance between analyzing secondary data and literature on the one hand, and undertaking personal discussions, semi-structured interviews and research collaborations with communities, school boards, band councils, and government officials. My intention throughout has been a project that is respectful and representative of what those working with Aboriginal children and/or in Aboriginal education feel needs to be done to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students on- and off-reserve, and that reflects the outcomes Aboriginal parents, schools

and communities want to achieve for the youth. However, there is a caveat to note: all of the schools and individuals involved in this project, but 3 of the 13 interviews, were located off-reserve in an urban provincial school. I have engaged with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal key informants that have provided feedback, guidance and support throughout the course of this project. In sum, in the collection and analysis of data for this project the goal was to develop a better understanding of the beliefs and values of practitioners (i.e., teachers, principals and senior administrators) working with Aboriginal students.

4.1. Literature Review

In total, over 50 pieces of literature were found and included a mixture of empirical journal articles, government and organizational research reports, book chapters, and advocacy pieces. The literature was found using a variety of search terms in a number of search engines, with Google Scholar and Simon Fraser's online Library database being the most used. For the most part the search was limited to the years 2004 – 2015. However, other articles from earlier years were uncovered and included if they were deemed relevant. From that initial review, only 17-20 pieces of literature was selected for this paper. Due to the scope and limited time to complete this project, the literature chosen was based on these criteria: relevance to research questions, the frequency the literature was referenced by stakeholders/key informants, the orientation of the paper (i.e., was it focused on successful learning outcomes) and the year it was published. The literature review had a 'snowball effect'; in such that with every discussion or literature read, another key paper, article, book or report would be included in my scope. The literature review is also important for providing background to the themes identified in the thematic analysis of the interviews and development of policy options.

4.2. Data

To better understand data surrounding Aboriginal educational outcomes and impacts in Canada among First Nations, Métis and Inuit, I assembled relevant

descriptive statistics. The sources include statistics downloaded online from Statistics Canada database for the Canadian Census on the Aboriginal population (2011) and the Aboriginal Children's Survey (2006), Aboriginal People's Survey (2006) which includes data and regional tables that are not in the Aboriginal People's Survey (2012), and from Provincial Ministries of Education databases on student performance data in B.C., Saskatchewan and Yukon.

4.3. Expert Interviews

The interviews for this study can be best described as a "snowball" sampling (Bryman, Bell, Teevan, 2012) technique where existing participants referred or connected me with future participants from among their acquaintances. The study's aim initially was to interview a few prominent government officials and academics in Aboriginal education, but the bulk of the interviews would be done with practitioners working at band-operated schools in B.C., Saskatchewan and representative schools with high proportions of Aboriginal students in Yukon. However, as research evolved, it became apparent that gaining access to these individuals was nearly impossible due to the political process for obtaining permissions. For example, access to practitioners was usually mediated by *gatekeepers* (e.g., organizations, boards, band councils ,etc.) that were concerned not only about my motives for the research, but also what the organization would gain from the research and the potential risks. Based on the timescales to attain approvals from these *gatekeepers*, and unforeseen inconveniences from the political sensitivity around the topic (i.e., I was conducting this study shortly after the failing of a momentous federal legislation, Bill C-33, regarding First Nations control over education and statutory funding), I was forced to alter my original scope. As a result, the scope altered to include practitioners from provincial schools that serve Aboriginal students in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Yukon. In addition, I expanded my sample to include more prominent academics and government officials in the two aforementioned provinces, and in territory.

The interview guide and questions were developed to further examine the policy problem and to answer the two research questions. The semi-structured interview was developed from questions of a similar nature asked to participants in the research of Bell

et al. (2004) and the AFN (2011). Prior to conducting any of the interviews, I had my supervisor and ethics approve the questions. I engaged (in-person, phone or Skype) and took field notes¹¹ with all future participants, and for two of the locations, applied and waited for an approved research protocol before interviews were conducted. Only after appropriate approvals were attained, ethics approved by the research ethics board at Simon Fraser University, and an initial conversation transpired, was an interview requested. Once an individual showed interest in sharing their experiences and perspectives in an interview, an email was sent with the attached interview guide and questions, informed consent form and ethics and/or research approval letter. From this approach, 8 interviews were collected from Saskatchewan, 3 from B.C., and 2 from Yukon. Additionally, 5 participants were of Aboriginal ancestry/identity, and 8 of non-Aboriginal ancestry/identity. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were mostly recorded by hand-written¹² field notes, or by the participant; some accepted the offer for member validation¹³. Finally I transcribed the notes to a word document for this research project. Furthermore, I acknowledge the centrality of my role in the knowledge production process—“The knower is part of the matrix of what is known”, (Dubois, 1983). Thus, I was part of all the knowledge produced in the interviews. The interviews do not statistically represent the Aboriginal population in any of the provinces or territory. They do, I believe, present views from key informants who work with Aboriginal children or/and in Aboriginal education, on factors of success and at the same time, the barriers to success. I discussed with participants themes around their experience working with Aboriginal children or in education, and then asked open-ended and dichotomous

¹¹ Fields notes are an ethnographic account of events, conversations, and behaviours and my own initial reflections on them (Bryman, Bell, Teevan, 2012). My field notes include ones I took from personal discussions and meetings with future participants that are strictly confidential and not used in this study, and also include ones in which informed consent was provided to be able to use in the study.

¹² Field notes were deemed to be the most time efficient and appropriate method to produce the most comfortable and least intimidating method for recording the interviews. I used Bryman, Bell, and Teevan, (2012) to guide me on how to take the most effective notes during an interview, and notes after the interview. I found the method difficult at times, due to my inexperience in knowing what should be recorded (I tried to write down everything). However, overtime I got better at focusing more on key themes and quotes communicated by the participant, than every word spoken, and would after the interview write up more detailed notes.

¹³ Member validation is process whereby the researcher provides the people whom they conducted research with an account of their findings from the interview and request their feedback on it (Bryman, Bell, and Teevan, 2012).

questions with prompts to further promote discussion about successful innovations, challenges, effective school-level policies, funding considerations, and what they felt needed to be done to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. The results from using thematic analysis and providing ‘thick description’(Geertz, 1973) of the interviewees perspectives will be discussed in Chapter 5, where similar themes identified in literature and interviews will be explored. The interviews also provide insight and translate into policy approaches to achieve more effective schools that advance Aboriginal students’ success. The semi-structured interview guide and questions can be found in Appendix A.

Table 4.1. Interview Log

Interview	Participant Information	Place	Mode	Duration
1	Band Council Leader	Province 1	Telephone	75 min
2	Principal	Province 1	In-Person* & Telephone	60 min
3	Principal	Province 3	Telephone	75 min
4	Academic Expert	Province 1	In-Person* & Skype	80 min
5	Teacher	Province 2	Online**	30 min
6	Principal	Province 1	In-Person & Telephone	60 min
7	Teacher	Province 2	In-Person	80 min
8	Senior Administrator	Province 1	Telephone	60 min
9	Principal	Province 3	In-Person	80 min
10	Education Leader	Province 3	Telephone & Online**	80 min
11	Academic Expert	Province 1	Telephone	60 min
12	Principal	Province 1	In-Person & Online**	60 min
13	Education Leader	Province 1	In-Person & Online**	75 min

Notes: Place of interview was masked and replaced with the generic term “Province 1, 2 or 3”. * Initial meeting took place in-person but interview was conducted by other means. **Due to timing constraints for certain participants they were offered the option of filling out the interview guide and submitting it to me online.

4.4. Thematic Analysis

For the purpose of this study I used 'theoretical thematic analysis'¹⁴ (Braun, Clarke, 2006) when analyzing the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, to provide a detailed analysis of specific sections of the data that would answer my research questions. I first transcribed the interview, and then read through it without taking any notes. Next I generated and coded the transcript at a *latent level*¹⁵ (Braun, Clarke, 2006) for relevant sections that helped with answering the research questions. After coding the transcript, I examined codes to interpret the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations in themes and selected portions of the data that would support key theories and findings identified in contributing literature on Aboriginal education. This form of analysis was completed in a constructivist paradigm (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Burr, 1995) where themes identified in the theoretical thematic analysis exercise either built on or conflicted with preceding literature. The key themes or patterns will be discussed in Chapter 5. A limitation of thematic analysis is that the aspects of coding and indicating themes involve a general degree of subjectivity. However, specific criteria for each coding category and converting them into themes were used to support a consistent and coherent process.

4.5. Ethics and Research Grant

All research was approved by the Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board, Simon Fraser University. In addition to ethics approval, three letters of support/research approvals were given; one from a school board, one from a First Nation organization and the last from a department of education. The letters gave the researcher permission to contact educators in the provincial school

¹⁴ "Theoretical" thematic analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, hence it is more explicitly analyst-driven. This type of thematic analysis usually provides less a rich description of the data overall, and "more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data"(Braun, and Clarke, 2006, p.12).

¹⁵ Thematic analysis that focuses on latent themes that tends (not always) to be more constructionist, that examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, and so on, that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun, Clarke, 2006, p.84-85).

system and band-operated school system. No external funding agencies were approached for financial support. The only funding that was provided was from Simon Fraser University in the form of a Minor Travel Research Grant that allowed the researcher to travel to Saskatchewan, within B.C., and to a First Nation reserve to meet with educators.

Chapter 5.

Research Findings –There are solutions out there, so why aren't we moving forward?

Research in this project provides examples of successful innovations. The interviews reinforce and further shape many of the same pertinent themes discussed in the literature and observed in the statistics. The most significant finding from the interview is that multi-pronged innovations have the best potential to enhance Aboriginal success rates. I identified two categories to summarize interview conclusions.¹⁶

- *Successful Innovations.* These entail incorporation of Aboriginal culture and language in the school; use of evidence-based learning tools (collection of student data, assessment and targeted resources); careful teacher selection; close attention to school leadership, effective school practices and system.
- *Barriers and Challenges to school success.* The factors cited include intergenerational trauma arising from colonization, discrimination, residential schools, poverty and marginalization; underfunding; low retention of good teachers; erratic and bureaucratic federal policies.

5.1. Summary of Significant Themes

*"Education is the key to open the door of opportunity for all people (FNESC/FNSA Motto, 2015)."

The following sections will discuss research results, primarily from the semi-structured interviews, and secondly from the analysis of survey data in Chapter 3, and research findings from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. To ensure participants

¹⁶ There was a slight difference in views between interviewees who had more experience with public schools and those with more experience with First Nation schools.

anonymity, and help readers follow along in this section, the following *Dramatis Personae* table was constructed.¹⁷

Table 5.1. Participants Interviewed for Project

Dramatis Personae - Participants Pseudonym's
Betty: First Nation Band Council Education Leader in Province 1
Dylan: Principal at a Public Elementary Catholic School in Province 1
Florence: Former Principal for 27 years at a First Nation School, now a Senior Administrator for First Nation Schools in Province 3
George: Academic and Senior Administrator in Province 1
Janine: First Nations Language Instructor in Province 2
Kurt: Former Principal in a Public Catholic High School with over 90 percent First Nation and Metis Student Population in Province 1, now a Senior Administrator
Logan: Elementary School Teacher in Province 2
Lucy: Senior Administrator in Province 1
Cordelia: Former principal at a First Nations School in Province 3
Peter: Former Provincial Education Leader in Province 3
Sara: Academic and Senior Administrator in Province 1
Tanya: Principal at a Public Catholic School with over 90 Percent First Nation and Metis Student Population in Province 1
Tristan: A Provincial Education Leader in Province 1

5.2. Successful Innovations

5.2.1. Culture and Language

The majority of participants indicate culturally relevant factors for the success of their Aboriginal students. It was thought very important to make space in the curriculum for culture and language programs, local cultural activities that run all school year long, for hiring local qualified teachers and support staff and local Elders. Kurt saw his high school go from 3 Aboriginal high school graduates in one year, to 30 the next year following a total reform of the school. The reform tackled the achievement gap in the classroom with teachers focusing on culturally relevant teaching and learning, and

¹⁷ Participants are given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

getting this content into the curriculum. Teachers could accomplish this by learning about Aboriginal students' history, Aboriginal specific ways of learning and by using inquiry based learning¹⁸. The full transformation was based on best practices found in New Zealand's Te Kotahitanga research and professional development programme that supports teachers to advance Māori students' learning and achievement. Literature speaks of this too. Bell, et al. (2004), found that effective schools offered an impressive array of instructional and extracurricular programs, which were culturally linked and relevant. Florence indicates the most successful innovation in the context of a First Nation school is the offering of courses in Aboriginal languages and culture. She notes that language and culture are the heart of First Nation schools. Aboriginal children and the community see and express themselves in a First Nation school. On the other hand, Florence's experience working in a public school was not the same. She was unable to re-create a similar school environment for Aboriginal students and the local Aboriginal community because she could not make space at the public school for culture and language programs for Aboriginal students, and for the community.

Aboriginal students' language and cultural programming is very important according to Tristan:

Introducing [language and cultural programming] makes sense when you have an education system that is bound in Western culture and paradigms. Every student should have an opportunity to experience his or her identity and culture within the context of the school...This is even more important for Aboriginal students.

This is reiterated in an interview with Logan, who notices a significant difference moving to a school where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can learn a First Nations' language, and that "there were First Nations' phrases and labeled doors throughout the school". Having qualified Aboriginal language teachers is essential to having a successful language program, without this, a language program would be ineffective. Some of the schools that offered language programs saw additional benefits for the families who were learning the language from their children. Dylan explains how

¹⁸ Inquiry based Learning: students are actively involved in what they are learning and solving authentic (real-life) problems within the context of the curriculum and/or community.

important it is for the Aboriginal people to preserve and restore their language, given the history in Canada of colonization and marginalization.

Lucy believes that historical/cultural teachings are important but they have limited relevance for urban Aboriginal people. For example, she explains that teaching Aboriginal children about residential schools in Canada and statistics on high levels of Aboriginal poverty, health issues, and so forth, implies that Aboriginal people are “doomed.” Looking at the many contemporary Aboriginal successes is important. Therefore, many schools also include contemporary Aboriginal culture and social media. Most participants indicate the importance of having Aboriginal role models visiting the school to talk about Aboriginal popular media and contemporary social justice. Participants indicate the importance for a school to listen to its students and the community and from listening, schools learn about key cultural activities such as talking circles, smudges, sweats, Aboriginal gardens, and much more.

Sara found in her own research that both Native and non-Native teachers benefited professionally from the integration of Elders into the school. Furthermore, the students felt with Elders that they had more access to indigenous knowledge, had non-judgmental support, and that Elders and counsellors were different: “Elders care; counsellors have to care”. On another note, George mentions the issue that Aboriginal education has the same gender issues that exist in mainstream society. For instance, most involved in band school politics in all levels of government are middle aged men.

Curricula for provincial schools are designed by the provincial education ministry and the schools and district do not always have the ability or resources to reform and/or make space for the cultural and language component. Partnerships with local Aboriginal communities and agencies may offer these programs and incorporate indigenous knowledge.

5.2.2. Evidence-Based Learning: Data, Assessment and Targeted Resources

Almost all participants believe evidence-based learning and programs are very important for the success of their students and their school. For instance, Tristan feels it

is very important for schools and school districts to routinely disaggregate data for Aboriginal students “so that we can target resources accordingly”. Data help target resources in programs that address specific needs of Aboriginal students. Tristan discusses three key innovations that help Aboriginal students. These include programs that address the cultural component, social disparities and learning disabilities. In school, these programs look like integrating First Nations spiritual cultural traditions within the context of the curriculum, in-house pediatric clinics that address health disparities, and math coaching programs. Tristan points out that most of the schools he works with typically address all three components.

The importance of collecting data on core subjects (i.e., reading, writing, mathematics, and cultural aspects) at the school level is reinforced in literature and in interviews. All principals speak to the importance of testing and using data to measure student performance. Data provide educators with a benchmark, and inform teacher instruction. Dylan states: “how do we know if what we are doing is working”? Data are important so schools can “analyze, reflect, adjust and move forward”, but only if the data are properly analyzed and interpreted. Furthermore, according to Dylan, data help create better teachers because data provide information on their impact on their students. As seen in statistics from the HAWD reports in Chapter 3, there is also a need for numeracy assessment and intervention. Measuring and evaluating not only the students’ performance, but also the teachers’, is essential to moving forward and creating effective teachers and schools. Sara notes the need to shift assessment discourse to teachers’ practices, because teachers’ performance measured would remove barriers and allow for more diversity in students learning of math, reading, etc., that benefits all students.

Florence states in her interview the importance of having standardized testing for First Nation student performance. Academic achievement is indicated as one of the most important areas her organization works on to ensure First Nation students are equipped with essential skills (i.e., competence in math, reading and writing). However, she cautions on how test results are used and the type of assessment. She notes that assessment that takes place only at the end of the year is not as effective as yearlong, on-going assessment. Nevertheless, according to Florence, there is room for both formative and summative testing. Bell, et al, (2004) identify a strong link between the use

of assessment data and higher student performance, hence they recommend that all band-operated schools measure, track, and report on student performance in part by participating in provincial assessments.

Other principals and teachers find holistic measures and assessments, especially if designed and implemented by Aboriginal staff, to be successful for the Aboriginal student population. As Janine explains, tests are important “because we need to be able to compare ‘apples to apples’, which assumes all students, are the same. The assessment tools need to be reflective of the population it is measuring (e.g., for a First Nation (FN) population, the test must be inclusive of FN perspectives and ways of knowing)”.

On the other hand, some are unsure about culturally relevant measures to assess student performance. For instance, Florence shares her experience working as a principal. When First Nation colleagues felt test questions were not culturally relevant, Florence would ask them which questions on the test they did not want the child to be able to answer, and in all cases they could not indicate one. Florence believes that instead it is more important that Aboriginal children be part of every culture, and gain a set of skills for whatever they want to do, whether they leave the community and work off-reserve or stay in their community. In sum, Florence believes that whatever they choose, they need basic core skills and the ability to think critically. This is seen in Chapter 3 where Aboriginal education data show a direct link between assessment and academic achievement.

The conclusion reached in literature, interviews and statistics is this: data are important—but what is more important is who designs the tests, who sets the standards, who decides what is being measured, when and who has access to the results, and what action is taken with the results.

5.2.3. Teacher background and relationships

Almost all practitioners indicate the importance of teachers having high expectations of their students. This is even more important when a teacher is non-Aboriginal. It is also important for teachers to recognize that having high expectations for

all students does not work; a teacher needs to have high expectations for Aboriginal students that are based on their uniqueness and abilities. Tristan speaks in detail about this. He notes:

[As stated earlier], high expectations are crucial. This is difficult for most non-Aboriginal educators as having high expectations for Aboriginal students states that they are equal and most educators do not believe that of indigenous children.

If the teacher has high expectations of the student, then Kurt suggests that this will lead to a better relationship between the student and teacher and will result in higher success rates. However, this relationship requires the sharing of power in the classroom, and many teachers usually have difficulty doing this. Teachers that share responsibility, and have experience with inquiry-based learning have more success getting their students to class. George references New Zealand's education program as a best practice that emphasizes the importance of effective classrooms, instruction tools and high expectations for the success of Aboriginal students. Other principals echo this; student achievement starts in the classroom with the teacher and this is where student success starts and builds on from.

The relationship with the community and the parent is also identified as important for the overall success of the student. Janine feels that the relationship with the parent is very important because both the teacher and parents "have responsibility to ensure the child is provided with the best education possible. It is crucial that they work together as a 'team' to ensure this." Florence indicates that the school and parent/family relationship is essential, especially for First Nation schools. She explains that many of the parents are terrified of schools because of the legacy of residential schools. To offset this issue, Tanya's school works hard at encouraging "a strong student voice for our parent and student community—from pursuing projects and personal interests to engagements in the school activities".

Professional development, experience and retention are other themes identified by participants. Tanya's prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms use "wichitowin" (i.e., a shared circle of responsibility) as the framework for their professional development. Tanya indicates its importance because "how do our teachers know what

they know?” It is extremely important, according to Kurt that non-Aboriginal teachers (and even Aboriginal) examine and reflect on their own assumptions, instructions, and values to understand how this impacts their students learning experience. Administrative support for teachers’ professional development in the classroom is important too. One such example involved Cordelia, who speaks about her previous role as an instructional leader helping her teachers recognize their impact on their students’ progress and learning experience so they could analyze and reflect on their teaching style and methods. Ultimately, schools need to tackle the achievement gap and deficit thinking in the classroom with teachers, which stems from professional development continuity, administrative teacher support, culturally relevant teachings, and personal relationships with the students, parents and community.

5.2.4. Administrative Background, Relationship and Leadership

The majority of participants and literature (Raham 2009; 2010; Steeves, et al, 2014) specify the importance of experienced administrators who are leaders and are able to balance administrative managerial tasks with classroom instruction. Lucy speaks about the success of a public school that hired principals with experience in inquiry based learning. Key characteristics mentioned by practitioners, regarding effectively run schools include principal experience, knowledge of their students and the community, sharing power on school goals with the local Aboriginal community, and partnerships with government and organizations to provide better access to services and programs for the students. The Fleming and Anderson (2013) paper argues that a shared vision is defined by three main features: “unity of purpose, consistency of practice, and collegiality and collaboration” (p 2).

5.2.5. Effective School Practices and System

In order for school practices and school systems to be effective, participants argue that they must be explicitly tailored to Aboriginal students, and not be based on the teachers’ or schools’ low expectations. Examples include, according to Kurt, offering credit recovery programs and dual credit classes to students, and use of quarter semesters. Additionally, Kurt and other participants mention the importance of allowing

Aboriginal students to complete high school in a self-paced, respectful and safe school environment. An example this type of academic system is the Individual Learning Centre in Yukon that allows students to complete high school at their own pace.

Tristan indicates school success in the hiring of staff from the local Aboriginal community. Other important aspects of a successful school according to Dylan are on-staff retention workers, and informal absenteeism practices that foster good attendance.

Services provided by the school which help Aboriginal students according to Lucy include daycare services in the school, transportation services for students in the form of subsidized bus passes and taxi services, high school certificate programs for adult learners (e.g. parents), and advanced technology and social media. Lucy argues that these services remove barriers that students may face.

Janine notes:

Allowing children to attend cultural activities and events throughout the year (e.g., potlatches, hunting camps, etc.) begin to restore traditional, cultural practices and help restore the traditional family unit. [And] having a school environment that is more welcoming for First Nation parents/families.

Florence indicates essential practices, for public schools, and for First Nations schools. In public schools, it is mandatory to have good relationships with the family. Florence states that “this cannot be done from a distance”. In First Nation schools, having a good relationship with the family will lead to higher attendance rates. Therefore, if a school is effective at building a good relationship, then formal attendance policies are not necessary.

Overall, good school practices that are identified in the interviews reinforce findings from literature (Raham, 2009; 2010). Having a high share of Aboriginal staff in school helps students to identify with their culture and ultimately with themselves. Steeves, et al. (2014) find that a positive safe school environment, and programs such as flexible scheduling, the block system, and practical and applied arts programs are important for the success of Aboriginal students.

5.3. Barriers and Challenges

5.3.1. Intergenerational Trauma (Colonization, Discrimination, Residential Schools, Poverty and Marginalization)

A majority of participants indicate racism as a major barrier for Aboriginal students and teachers. They feel racism is more evident in a societal context; it exists in schools but is more subtle. In the school, racism could be explicit (e.g., stereotypes, etc.) or implicit (e.g., teachers having low expectations of Aboriginal students). Lucy explains that racism is evident in teacher deficit thinking. She suggests an educational reform for deficit views, like in New Zealand, where changes are with not just teachers understanding of racism, but as well its effect on their relationships with students. Florence calls this form of implicit discrimination “covert racism”, which is seen in teachers’ low expectations.

Tristan notes:

The greatest impediment to Aboriginal success is the presence of deficit thinking with teachers and the pathologizing of Aboriginal students with curriculum. When Aboriginal students come to a curriculum that is based on Western European, middle-class Christian ideals, there is always a deficit present. This deficit can be addressed but there has to be a deliberate effort to engage Aboriginal students in learning relationships that honour their worldview and life ways.

Tristan elaborates on discrimination:

[Racism and marginalization] of Indigenous peoples in provincial schools is widespread. I believe that this is the scenario that requires a national inquiry, not a band-controlled education. There is not only complacency regarding racism in schools but systems are built to perpetuate racism. This happens every time decisions are made as to whether we will support Aboriginal student success for all student success. Aboriginal students are set against the mainstream from the day they enter prekindergarten and their learning needs are adjudicated against a backdrop that first and foremost considers whether the mainstream will be negatively affected.

Sara notes: “Aboriginal people expect racism every day, how to prepare for this is not in any curriculum”. She indicates that systemic bias in educational systems is

damaging for all students. New Zealand's practices are ones that Canada should consider adopting. New Zealand has a national agenda for inquiring into racism, which is what, Tristan argues, is needed here. In sum, as Florence notes, the paradigm that First Nations are less than other Canadians needs to change.

Janine argues for the elimination of "tokenism" within the education system. An example of "tokenism" is 'First Nation culture weeks' that contribute only a week of learning about Aboriginal culture, knowledge and life ways. Janine argues that such programs should be replaced with "school-wide year-long curriculum and programming". She also indicates the need to "address systemic racism in relation to policies and practices", which is an important recommendation highlighted in literature (Toulouse, 2013; Carr-Stewart, 2006).

Janine notes the most significant barrier facing Aboriginal students in her school and community is:

Intergenerational trauma in relation to residential school system/era (poverty, alienation from language/culture/community, disconnection from traditional teachers/elders, and the loss of language and cultural identity)

On another note, Dylan indicates poverty as a significant barrier to the development and learning outcomes of Aboriginal students at his school. He notes that though poverty is something the school can usually deal with, it is other impacts from the indirect effects on kids from parents that went to a residential school. This is seen in kids having low self-aspirations, which Dylan argues are harder to deal with. He suggests that school personnel, community and families need to "raise the bar and close the gap" by having achievable high expectations for Aboriginal students, in order to address this barrier.

Intergenerational trauma also affects parents' role within the school. Tristan has witnessed how little political capital Aboriginal parents have in the school their children go to. He explains the reason for this is:

[Parents of aboriginal children] are at a disadvantage because they have to challenge a system that prefers to keep them out. These parents have been subordinate through the same system that their

children attend and they have very little political capital in schools. I can attest to the fact that similar requests that come from a non-Aboriginal, affluent parent will be addressed immediately where similar requests from Indigenous families will routinely go unmet.

In curricula and the education system there is a need to decolonize and de-institutionalize education. Dylan argues that the more a school de-institutionalizes, the more likely parents and communities will engage with the school. This is something that would benefit Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Marie Battiste (2013) in her book “Decolonizing Education” argues that current educational policies must undergo substantive reforms, because of the devastating impact they have had on Indigenous knowledge. Battiste advocates for a model of education that decolonizes Indigenous education. She argues that decolonizing “first and foremost must be framed within the concepts of dialogue, respect for educational pluralities, multiplicities, and diversities (Battiste, 2013, p.107)”.

5.3.2. Underfunding

The underfunding of public and First Nation schools is a complex issue, brought up by all participants. Tristan notes:

The needs of Indigenous students are vastly underfunded in public education systems, especially in [Province 1]. The scope of the problem might be recognized but solutions are left to local control without the requisite targeted resources. The result is that funds for Aboriginal education end up being adjudicated alongside of other needs that pale in comparison. An example of this would be English as an additional language funding

The presence of a funding gap is a highly debated matter. For instance, Peter argues that because the formulae between provincial and reserve schools vary for funding, and the “circumstances in which the formulae are applied change quite quickly, the level of funding dispensed ranges from woefully inadequate to what is likely far more than is needed”. Literature can attest to this; some argue that funding for Aboriginal students has historically been inadequate and unequal compared to other Canadians. What might be more important is to look at the funding for certain programs, services, and operations. For instance, Janine notes that the most important funding concern for

her is restoring/revitalizing Aboriginal languages. Others indicate inadequate funding to maintenance and operations. For instance, Dylan notes that his school is currently operating at 140% of capacity and is in dire need of an upgrade or new school to adequately serve all students.

Sara indicates that the historical and systemic underfunding of Aboriginal education has undermined academic programs and their availability. In her province, Aboriginal education is based on year-to-year proposal-based funding, and because the Aboriginal student population is diverse and highly mobile this funding has been reallocated to other programs such as French immersion programs. Sara states that these privileged programs see much more money than any Aboriginal program.

On another note, Tanya indicates that broad-based systemic practices and broader determinants of health are a serious barrier to the achievement of Aboriginal students. She notes:

I used to think that [the barrier] was access—we also have the highest poverty in the community in which I serve—the initial lack of access to good medical care, housing, fresh food, etc.—but now I think that the biggest barrier is about *broad-based system practice*; an orientation that ‘one size fits all’ that marginalizes our population. Ratios, proportions, percentages...an accountability era that sorts, counts, meets, then applies a formula to spit out a response based on disparities. Our priority, then, is to seek and to find a narrow way. To start by listening, to know and value that our community wants the best for its children, for power structures to be examined (justice, social services) and active trust to be at the core of our (democratic) decisions.

These broad system practices and broader determinants of health have had direct impacts on schools, especially when there is proposal-based funding that is based on the number of Aboriginal students, the number of special need students, and so on. A formula attempts to solve these issues by applying a “one size fits all” solution that does not always work well. Instead, formulas should take differences into account.

The Assembly of First Nations (2011) surveyed approximately 400 band-operated schools, and identifies funding as the biggest barrier schools face. Another example of inadequate funding was staff salary and benefits, which is brought up in

discussions and an interview with a former educator at a band-operated school. For example, Cordelia mentions the disincentive for teachers and principals to work at a First Nation school because benefits are not provided and they do not get a pension; like they would at a provincial school.

Western Eurocentric curriculum and practices have been identified in literature and the interviews as counterproductive. For example, there exists a need for Aboriginal students to have more access to the outside world, which involves transportation costs not now covered by AANDC. Peter states: “[Aboriginal students] transportation arrangements prevent participation in extracurricular programs, which are places that can break down discrimination”. He also argues that the transition of reserve students (usually from on-reserve primary school to provincial secondary school) “needs to be much more carefully managed by both sides than has been the case to date. The timing of drop-outs confirms this”.

Some other examples from interviews and literature include funding and accessibility to secondary and third services (McCue, 2006), inadequate proposal based funding, student special needs funding (Richards, Anderson, forthcoming), funding for Aboriginal Education Teacher Programs (Raham 2009; 2010) and funding for Aboriginal students post-secondary education.

5.3.3. Teacher Retention, Supply and Quality

A significant barrier is teacher retention and high staff turnover, especially in regards to Aboriginal language teachers. For example, Tanya indicates the importance of offering language and cultural programming, but also indicates that “Cree speakers are few and far between”. Another principal indicates the challenge of recruiting those who fluently spoke Cree to his school because of the location of the school (off-reserve), and the expense of living off-reserve. Isolation pay is a significant barrier for recruiting quality and experienced teachers to First Nations schools, which are for the most part small, isolated, and rural. However, even in the public school system it has been difficult recruiting Aboriginal teachers, and First Nation language instructors because of tight budgets, inadequate supply of qualified teachers, and limited use of Aboriginal

languages due to a history of assimilation and colonization. Lucy indicates the lack of training of a strong and knowledgeable cadre of teachers able to teach Aboriginal culture, history and issues such as racism and deficit thinking. New teachers are unaware of the cultural biases and discrimination embedded in education systems that serve Aboriginal students.

Peter indicates the need to reform teacher training and certification programs, a recommendation also presented in Raham's (2009) policy paper. Peter indicates an issue with teacher ability and turnover, as most band-operated schools attract beginning teachers, and that these teachers usually leave too quickly. He notes "current policies around training and certification need reconsideration in order to develop a stronger cadre of experience teachers". Sara emphasizes that discrimination and ignorance exist often in urban settings and in schools. For instance, it is viewed that Aboriginal teachers and their education programs are lesser than non-Aboriginal teachers and non-Aboriginal education programs. Aboriginal teachers and education programs have to be brought into parity with non-Aboriginal teachers and education programs. The training should not end here; it needs to be integrated into continuous professional development and support of teachers in their careers, like done in New Zealand's Te Kotahitanga program, where teachers create a shared learning environment that engages and motivates students to attend class and gets them excited about learning.

5.3.4. Governance and Federal Policies

Erratic and bureaucratic federal policies are identified as major barriers impeding the success of schools and the Aboriginal students they serve. For instance, in discussing Bill C-33 Tristan notes:

As a provincial education leader, I will say that federal education is led by some of the worst bureaucrats and hacks in the country. I would not allow them to run a school where my children attended yet they have huge influence over band-controlled education.

Management quality of First Nation education comes up in discussions and interviews with education leaders, academics and policy experts. Peter on the topic of Bill C-33, indicates:

Statutory funding would have to be adequate. Canada has managed to duck this responsibility for some time. Why would it not continue to do so? The Council of Education Professionals [proposed in the bill] had too many responsibilities. It would be ineffective without a large and skilled staff. AANDC has not got such a staff. Why would the Council be given one? It is a solution in search of a problem in my view.

Lucy indicates that the downfall of Bill C-33 was a result of the top-down approach taken, the low levels of consultation, and uncertainty on whether the bill was what First Nations wanted. Results could have been different if a bottom-up approach had been taken. Similarly, George brings up the issue of consultation, and the failure of the federal government to attain the assent of First Nations. He acknowledges that the main features of the bill would have had good impacts, however there were too many issues in the wording, nature and development of the bill. For example, the colonial reference to the two primary languages in Canada as English and French. The bill indicated Indigenous languages as less important than the two primary languages. Furthermore, he feels that the accountability layout was “fuzzy,” and implied that First Nations could not manage their own schools. Peter thinks it is important that people are held accountable for what they do, whether it is the Deputy Minister of AANDC, a First Nation government, or a provincial department of education. They all need to be accountable, whether to Aboriginal people and/or the government. Betty mentions overlapping jurisdictions, the diversity of educational agreements and diversity of First Nation groups in Canada, as significant barriers to a national reform of Aboriginal education.

5.4. Summing up

In conclusion, the research findings indicate there is an urgent need for education reform. However, as Mendelson (2009) mentions, it is difficult to do this, especially a whole system reform, because at current there exists a ‘non-system’ for Aboriginal education. Nonetheless, any reform is best done when Aboriginal groups are partners in decisions around Aboriginal education. Furthermore, it is clear from the literature and interviews that any reform must incorporate a multi-pronged approach to the different factors of success, as well the barriers and challenges. We cannot fix one

without considering the other. Evidently, a 'one size fits all' model will not work, and this is mostly due to the cultural and historical diversity among Aboriginal groups, and what the interviewees spoke more to – conflicting interests between ideas around education (e.g., definition of success, cultural based measures, etc.), among different stakeholders, across jurisdictions and amongst Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Moreover, Aboriginal students should not participate in just Western Eurocentric education. When policymakers and educators have tried to apply the same curricula and pedagogy they use for other Canadian students to Aboriginal students they see declines in success rates, the persistence of social disparities, perpetuation of racism, and overrepresentation of Aboriginal students in special needs programs. The interviews articulate common themes shared among the two provinces and territory translated into elements of the recommended policy options in the next Chapter. The interviews are valuable because they provide feedback from education experts on the current education systems in B.C., Saskatchewan and Yukon, and current options for next steps.

The subsequent section will present objectives, measures and policy approaches.

Chapter 6.

Policy objectives, criteria and measures

The following section provides an outline and description of the policy objectives, as well as the criteria and measures that are used to evaluate the policy options in terms of meeting the objectives.

Each criterion is defined and associated with one or more measures; the measures provide tangible means by which to evaluate the level of success of each policy alternative in meeting the criterion.

Table 6.1. Legend of Measurement






Very High		Low	
High		Very Low	
Moderate			

Table 6.2. Criteria and Measures

Criteria	Measures
<p>Stakeholder Acceptability This assesses probability of acceptance of a policy option by all stakeholders in Aboriginal education. The stakeholders include 1)Aboriginal peoples, 2)all levels of government, and 3)public and band-operated schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will the policy be accepted by all stakeholders? Low implies acceptance by only the government stakeholder. Moderate implies acceptance by all government and either Aboriginal peoples or school educators. High implies acceptance by all 3 stakeholders. - Will the policy promote engagement and respectful dialogue, obtain assent and allow for collaboration with all stakeholders? - The assessment of this criterion is based on research findings in the literature, and perceptions from discussions and interviews with stakeholders.
<p>Developmental/ Capacity Building This assesses the expected transformation and increase of social and political capital on three levels: 1)the personal (students), 2)collective (community) and 3) institutional (education system).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will the policy help build the capacity of Aboriginal students and community? - Will the policy increase social capital of students in school, and society, and increases political capital of communities and families? - The assessment of this criterion is informed by information gathered from discussions and interviews with stakeholders, literature and statistics.
<p>Horizontal Equity This assesses the extent of comparable per-student funding among Aboriginal students on-reserve, Aboriginal students off-reserve and non-Aboriginal students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are impacts from the policy likely to increase equity across all groups, in terms of accessibility to services, among reserve schools and between reserve and non-Aboriginal schools with similar characteristics?
<p>Effectiveness This assesses more narrowly defined education goals (e.g., expected student success rates for tests on core competencies, and comprehension of cultural goals as defined by First Nations, educators and parents).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will the policy improve performance in core competencies, graduation rates and meet cultural goals? - Does the policy reflect the objectives of First Nations, parents and educators? - The assessment is informed from information obtained from literature, and discussions and interviews with stakeholders (i.e. educators, education leaders, etc.)
<p>Budgetary impacts and costs This assesses budgetary impacts and costs, examining the amount of existing budget or additional costs that will be required to design, implement and enforce a proposed policy approach. (If a policy approach has a low budgetary impact it receives a “high” score; vice-versa for a high budgetary impact, receiving a “low” score.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will the policy option imply significant increase in AANDC education budget? - The assessment is informed from information obtained from literature

6.1. Policy Options and Analysis

The following section presents an overview of policy options indirectly informed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, descriptive statistics that show superior outcomes in B.C. under a tripartite agreement, and research findings in the literature. Aboriginal education is a complex entanglement of governance and there are many variables influencing the success of Aboriginal students and schools that serve them; thus by no means is this list of policy approaches exhaustive. There are some cautions that must be presented: I spoke primarily with those who work in provincial school systems. Only two participants work or worked at a First Nation school, and one on a band council. Although there are similarities between provincial schools with large Aboriginal student cohorts and reserve schools, they are ultimately managed and funded very differently. The purpose of this project was to understand how schools operate from the perspectives of practitioners who teach Aboriginal students, and from this suggest future directions that would leverage further progress for both students on-and off-reserve.

Any program or policy, whether national, provincial, or local, according to the literature, needs stable and sustainable funding, shared and enhanced accountability, jointly managed curricula, academic and cultural assessments, and standards that respect the diversity among Aboriginal peoples on- and off-reserve. Further, any policy or initiative must take into account the high and growing proportion of urban Aboriginal people who are moving off-reserve and into the city for reasons of education (Environics Institute, 2010). In 2011, the census data showed that off-reserve Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of Canadian society. In 2011, 56 percent of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas. The interviewers helped indirectly inform the four policy options because the participants discussed central elements and criteria for any educational reform or initiative:

- A national strategy would be ideal, but not feasible right now;
- Successful innovations have occurred at the provincial or local level, are school-based, and are usually underfunded;
- However, even with a small budget and funding that is year to year, schools can get creative and expand their resources by joining up with other school boards, local community, organizations and the province;

- It is extremely difficult to admit that even with all the hard work by schools, educators and governments, and the incremental improvements seen in the status quo, we are still failing to serve Aboriginal students the same quality of education every other Canadian student is provided;
- What works in one region or territory may not work for all Aboriginal groups across Canada, and may not even within a province/territory;
- Educators were concerned with school-level policies and issues; therefore, their preferred approach would be one with impacts at the school level not the band/government level;
- Political and jurisdictional conflicts have hindered and slowed down many educational systemic reforms, even small ones at a First Nations band level.





All these considerations are reflected in definition of the following four policy options. I will analyze each policy option and examine its implications on schools, communities and Aboriginal students.





Table 6.3. Policy Options





Policy Option	Main Features	Jurisdiction	Relevant examples
Status Quo	Diverse and heterogeneous policies: local agreements; Indian Act as federal legislative basis; many provincial agreements; complex funding arrangements with AANDC for reserve schools and reserve students studying in provincial schools. Most First Nation schools remain operated and controlled by individual First Nations.	Federal, Provincial, and First Nations	Relevant examples range from FNEC/FNSA in B.C to AANDC funding arrangements for individual First Nations.
National enabling Legislation (a “First Nation Education Act”)	Legislated minimum organizational structures separating reserve schools from band councils; statutory requirement for per student funding comparability with provincial school students (regional AANDC offices and provincial First Nations and/or their organizations negotiate per student comparability, in a process akin to provincial bargaining between education ministries and school districts); Joint Council of Education Professionals, to improve professional decision-making by AANDC and First Nations.	Federal and First Nations	New Zealand Te Kotahitanga, Bill C-33 (First Nation Control of First Nation Education Act)
Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Non-legislated route: AANDC proposes core academic subject goals and offers modest financial incentives to realize them; First Nation communities set cultural goals; regional AANDC offices and provincial First Nations and/or their organizations negotiate per student comparability as in legislated option.	Federal and First Nations	Mi'kmaq school model in Nova Scotia; Muskeg Lake Nation in Saskatchewan,
Tripartite Agreements	Shared AANDC/First Nation/provincial decision-making and ownership for First Nation education on- and off-reserve, funding, access to secondary and third level services, curricula development and design, provincial education data, information and research, school board like organizations.	Provincial, Federal and First Nations	B.C. Tripartite Agreement (between AANDC, BC government and FNEC/FNSA)





6.1.1. Analysis of all Policy Options





Table 6.4. Summary Analysis Table of all Policy Options

	Status Quo	National Legislation "First Nation Education Act"	Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Tripartite Agreements
Criteria	Score			
Stakeholder Acceptability	<p>The status quo receives a low score for stakeholder acceptability because it has failed to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students both on-and off-reserve and there are no agreements at this time on other options to pursue. It has also been associated with ongoing conflicts between First Nations and AANDC, between First Nations and provincial school districts.</p> 	<p>FNEA option receives a low score for stakeholder acceptability because, as the literature and interviews that discuss Bill C-33 indicate, a legislated approach at the moment will not gain wide support and acceptance.</p> 	<p>Stakeholder acceptance would be at the local level, so it would be less difficult to attain than at the national or provincial level. However, even within the local level differences exists that need to be taken into account and that will not be easy to resolve. Therefore, a moderate score is given.</p> 	<p>This option scores moderate in stakeholder acceptance because it usually requires the agreement of all participating First Nations in a province, the provincial government and the federal government. However, there can be First Nation groups that do not participate in provincial level First Nation associations, and other Aboriginal identity groups are typically not part of the agreement.</p> 

	Status Quo	National Legislation “First Nation Education Act”	Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Tripartite Agreements
Criteria	Score			
Development/ Capacity Building	<p>This policy approach receives a low score. Though it may help build the capacity and social and political capital of some Aboriginal students and community it generally hinders the capacity- and capital-building potential.</p> 	<p>Improving Aboriginal education via legislation could include adequate statutory funding, and a reporting, accountability and management framework. With these elements an FNEA would have high potential for building the capital and capacity of Aboriginal students and communities in Canada. A FNEA could act as the foundation for First Nations to undertake systemic reform of their education.</p> 	<p>This approach would build the capacity and capital of students, their families and the local community. It would benefit from having both academic and cultural goals as part of an educational plan that both AANDC and the reserve jointly support. Therefore, the approach receives a high score.</p> 	<p>The option has the potential to build the capacity and capital of the students, communities and institutions impacted by the agreement. A score of high applies to developmental capacity.</p> 

	Status Quo	National Legislation “First Nation Education Act”	Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Tripartite Agreements
Criteria	Score			
Horizontal Equity	<p>A low score is given for equity because impacts are not distributed equally across groups (i.e., Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginal). Many Aboriginal schools lack the resources to effectively teach and manage a quality school, and in the status quo some Aboriginal groups are better off than others</p> 	<p>FNEA approach receives a moderate score because it focuses on the specific needs of First Nation students. Therefore, impacts are distributed equally across First Nation groups. Finding comparable provincial schools and addressing the diverse needs of Aboriginal groups are challenges that will take time to address, but will pay future dividends to all Canadians.</p> 	<p>In terms of equity, a score of moderate score is given because this approach would equally distribute resources among equal groups (First Nation and non-First Nation); however, AANDC would have to be careful to ensure that resources are distributed equally among the different First Nation groups in a given province.</p> 	<p>A score of high is given because AANDC and the province/territory could potentially agree on funding arrangements provided by AANDC for schools both on- and off-reserve and develop tuition agreements that have conditions attached to them, such as ensuring that cultural and language programs are provided, making sure the student is at or above grade level, and so forth.</p> 

	Status Quo	National Legislation “First Nation Education Act”	Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Tripartite Agreements
Criteria	Score			
Effectiveness	<p>The status quo is given a very low score for effectiveness because it has failed to improve performance in core competencies, failed to increase high school completion rates and meet cultural goals of Aboriginal families and communities in a speedy fashion. This is salient in the graduation rates statistics highlighted in Chapter 3. It is also evident from the research findings that the status quo does not reflect the objectives of schools and Aboriginal families, which are best seen in interviews with participants regarding the failure of having schooling that Aboriginal students can identify with and flourish in.</p> 	<p>Unlike the status quo, a FNEA offers the opportunity of structuring systemic change for simultaneously improving academic performance and meeting cultural goals. A FNEA gets a moderate score on its ability to accomplish these academic and cultural goals.</p> 	<p>This option promotes discussions with First Nations about their goals and priorities and thus could foster opportunities for improvement on both core subjects, and cultural aspects, and increase high school completion rates. Therefore, because this approach includes economic, educational and cultural incentives that could have positive outcomes for both AANDC and First Nation groups, it gets a high score for effectiveness.</p> 	<p>A moderate score is given because if other provinces could replicate B.C.'s encompassing First Nation organizations, they could hope for similar academic and cultural outcomes. However, other provinces may not be as successful in building encompassing organizations. Nevertheless, a tripartite approach would potentially support many Aboriginal students.</p> 

	Status Quo	National Legislation “First Nation Education Act”	Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach	Tripartite Agreements
Criteria	Score			
Budgetary impacts and costs	<p>The status quo does not require more expenditure than under present projections. Currently, the federal government spends approximately \$1.65 billion a year on First Nations schooling. Therefore, it receives a moderate score for budgetary impacts.</p> 	<p>This approach would require additional resources in time, funds and staff beyond the current budget to implement. Bill C-33 and accompanying agreements implied AANDC assuming additional annual costs of 25%. Therefore, on this criterion it gets a low score.</p> 	<p>As with the legislative option, this option implies significant increases in AANDC budget for reserve schools. Therefore, it receives a low score.</p> 	<p>This policy approach gets a moderate score because budget and costs to implement this policy approach would likely come from an existing federal budget, same as the status quo, but extra expenditure would likely be needed. For example, AANDC spends an additional \$15 million annually on B.C., First Nation schools.</p> 

6.1.2. Status Quo

The status quo is all current governing arrangements in Canada that regulate and manage Aboriginal education. This option requires no policy change. It has enabled small incremental changes. Included in the status quo are the Indian Act, and a variety of local agreements. The Constitution puts the federal government in charge of education of First Nation children living on-reserve, while provinces control and manage education for everyone else, including First Nation children of families living off-reserve.






Underfunding and inaccessibility to secondary and tertiary services is a serious issue in the status quo for many schools that serve First Nation students. However,

some reserve schools have agreements that provide additional access to services. Students attending a school off-reserve have higher success rates than those attending a school on-reserve. This has resulted in many Aboriginal families migrating to cities. In some provinces, First Nations have more effective provincial- or regional-level educational organizations that work with the provincial education ministry, as in B.C.

At present, AANDC does help bands form into larger units of management with funding for planning, operations and implementation (Anderson, and Fleming, 2014). This option is the least homogenous among the options; it reflects the divisions among First Nation leaders across Canada on Aboriginal education—a major obstacle in achieving widespread academic improvement. The status quo is the most authoritative approach; therefore, the least likely to result in a jointly managed system for Aboriginal students.

6.1.3. Summary Analysis of Status Quo

Table 6.5. Summary Analysis of Status Quo

Criteria	Measures	Measure Score
Stakeholder Acceptability	➤ Acceptability to all stakeholders and policy initiates , respectful engagement, assent, collaboration and dialogue	Low 
Development/Capacity Building	➤ Policy helps build the capacity of Aboriginal students and community and Increases social capital of students in school, and society, and increases political capital of communities and families	Low 
Horizontal Equity	➤ Are financial impacts from the policy likely to increase equity across all groups	Low 
Effectiveness	➤ Improves performance in core competencies and meets cultural goals and reflect the objectives of First Nations, parents and educators	Very Low 
Budgetary impacts and costs	➤ Significant increase in AANDC education budget	Moderate 

Relative to reasonable expectations, the status quo has failed in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students both on- and off-reserve because of how slow the improvements have been. Stakeholders have accepted the status quo because there is no agreement at this point on other options. Some participants interviewed have nonetheless achieved success in their respective domains, but they still considered the status quo as a barrier to further success. The division of education powers (federal vs. provincial) applies even when reserve and provincial schools sit side by side, resulting in jurisdictional issues. Therefore, status quo receives a low score for stakeholder acceptability.

Clearly, some Aboriginal groups are presently faring better than others, and those who succeed are building the capacity of their students and communities. However the literature and my interviews indicate still a general lack of social capital and political capital among the students, families, communities and Aboriginal organizations/band councils. Thus, the status quo gets a low score for capacity building and for increasing social and political capital.

Barriers to achieving effective schools include lack of equitable funding and services for Aboriginal students, and the low quality of management of many schools. Unless a group of First Nation educators collaborates or has an agreement with other Aboriginal groups or with a provincial school, or is part of a tripartite agreement, it will lack adequate skilled staff, resources, and services. Anecdotal experiences shared by some participants highlight inequities of funding among First Nation and Métis students. Therefore, the status quo receives a score of low for equity.

In terms of effectiveness, the status quo is assessed as having a very low impact on improving the academic achievement in core competencies, increasing high school completion rates, and meeting the cultural goals of Aboriginal communities. Literature, interviews and statistics all indicate that the current system or “non-system” of Aboriginal education is failing Aboriginal students on-and off-reserve. There are some improvements when we look at provincial successes, or case studies of particularly effective First Nation schools, but on the whole, the status quo fails in achieving

widespread improvement. Additionally, the status quo does not reflect and represent the objectives of Aboriginal communities and schools.

The status quo does not require more expenditure than under present projections. Currently the federal government spends approximately \$1.65 billion a year on First Nations schooling (Fleming, and Anderson, 2013), and with the 2% funding cap, funding probably will expand slowly in the coming years. Therefore, it receives a moderate score for budgetary impacts.

6.1.4. National Legislation: First Nation Education Act

The structural factors of any First Nation Education Act (FNEA) should be simple: it should embody the idea that Aboriginal children are entitled to effectively managed and culturally sensitive education that leverages high performance and attainment of basic core skills (i.e., numeracy, reading and writing) (AFN/AANDC, 2012). Moreover, any education act will have to fully recognize and incorporate the treaty and self-governing rights of Aboriginal peoples. This option could ultimately affect all First Nation groups in Canada, but need not be mandatory. Some nationally coordinated approaches include Australia's "Whole of School Intervention Strategy" and New Zealand's "Student Engagement Initiative" that have significantly increased their indigenous graduation rates (Raham, 2010). Unlike the status quo and tripartite agreement approach, a FNEA would have a national reach, if implemented.






In retrospect, Bill C-33's route of requiring certain mandatory organizational structures will not work. Some argue it might work if statutory provisions were entirely voluntary. An anecdote must be noted: the tabling of Bill C-33 presented challenges to doing research and discussing jurisdiction and governance with stakeholders. When participants were asked questions regarding Aboriginal jurisdiction over education, many provided little to no information. Moreover, very few principals and teachers had read Bill C-33. What concerned them were everyday school politics and policies. There are however some elements of Bill C-33 that could work. One is the requirement for statutory funding. This should be worked out by regional AANDC offices in each province in a collective bargaining process similar to that between provincial educational

ministries and their respective school districts (Richards, 2014). Contrary to the status quo, and tripartite agreement, this process would require making the results public, would guarantee equity across reserve schools within any province, and accommodate the costs of potential reorganization of reserve schools into school authorities (Richards, 2014).

National legislation could enable First Nation School Boards or Regional Education Authorities (Mendelson, 2009; Richards, 2014), and a reporting strategy that sets standards for all school systems that is agreeable and credible across provinces and territories (Bell, et al, 2004; Raham 2009; 2010). Research and interviews have indicated the value of a council of First Nation education professionals (a provision of Bill C-33). There is currently no legislation that recognizes First Nations' right to control their own education and to set up organizations that would allow them to do this—and this policy approach is the only one that would accomplish this. The *Indian Act* is not adequate, and as Mendelson (2009, p.29) argues, “[the Indian Act’s] provisions regarding education are completely obsolete, colonialist and an embarrassment to Canada.”

Summary Analysis of FNEA option

Table 6.6. Summary Analysis of FNEA option

Criteria	measures	Measure & Score
Stakeholder Acceptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acceptability to all stakeholders and policy initiates , respectful engagement, assent, collaboration and dialogue 	Low 
Development/Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policy helps build the capacity of Aboriginal students and community and Increases social capital of students in school, and society, and increases political capital of communities and families 	High 
Horizontal Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are financial impacts from the policy likely to increase equity across all groups 	Moderate 
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improves performance in core competencies and meets cultural goals and reflect the objectives of First Nations, parents and educators 	Moderate 
Budgetary impacts and costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Significant increase in AANDC education budget 	Low 

Literature and interviews that discuss Bill C-33 indicate that a legislated approach, at the moment, will not gain the support and acceptance of most First Nation leaders in Canada. Reasons include the charge of imposing a top-down approach, lack of transparency around funding, control and rights, and inadequate consultation and negotiation with all Aboriginal groups (Mendelson, 2014; Galloway 2011). A bottom-up approach would likely do a better job at attaining the assent and acceptance of Aboriginal groups. A national legislated approach needs to respect the important differences among Aboriginal people and their treaty rights, be child-centered and allow First Nations to choose whether to opt in or out, similar to *The First Nations Land*

Management Act 1999 (Mendelson, 2014). However, to date this has not occurred—and realizing these goals via legislation is unlikely for some time. Therefore, it is assessed that stakeholder acceptance gets a low score.

Improving indigenous education is a national priority in New Zealand and Australia. This should be so in Canada. Any strategy or policy approach in Canada needs to have a national reach that acts as a hedge against school dropouts. If the improvement of Aboriginal education via legislation includes adequate statutory funding, and a reporting, accountability and management framework, it would have high potential for building the capacity of Aboriginal students and communities in Canada. A FNEA could act as the foundation for First Nations to undertake systemic reform of their education, and build their own First Nations education system (Mendelson, 2009). Additionally, it would help First Nations and AANDC become more accountable and enable AANDC to effectively support a First Nation education system. This option has high potential of increasing the social capital of Aboriginal students in school, and the community, and of increasing the political capital of communities and families because it would have a national reach. Raham (2009) indicates in her paper (p. 73): “good governance also focuses on building capacity and fostering innovations at all levels of organizations”. A drawback of this approach is that it is limited to First Nation schools on-reserve.

The policy approach focuses on the specific needs of First Nation students. Funding should be needs-based, predictable, guaranteed, sustainable, and include accountability for the use of funds for education purposes (AFN/AANDC, 2012). Essentially, this is what Bill C-33 was proposing. It needs to be worked out how to determine comparable small provincial schools to use as basis for comparing on-reserve and provincial per-student funding. This will not be easy to determine or implement because different formulas are used in each province, and finding comparable provincial schools and addressing the diverse needs of Aboriginal groups are all challenges that will take time. Thus, FNEA approach receives a moderate score in terms of equity.

Literature and interviews reinforce the importance of pan-Canadian evidence on student performance in terms of core academic subjects and cultural aspects. Without

reasonable mastery of core subjects such as reading, and finishing high school, First Nation students cannot realistically choose between a future on- and off-reserve (Anderson, and Richards, forthcoming). Historically, parents of children attending reserve schools have not been provided information on performance of their children and on overall school quality. This should change, and unlike the status quo, a FNEA offers the opportunity of structuring systemic change for improving academic performance and meeting cultural goals. It is impossible to measure progress without data. Therefore, it is assessed that a FNEA gets a moderate score for effectiveness.

This approach would require additional resources in time, funds and staff beyond the current budget to implement. Bill C-33 estimated additional costs at a 25 % annual increase. Therefore, on this criterion it gets a low score.

Overall, if the aim is a Canada-wide inclusive FNEA, AANDC will need to attain substantive support. This task is not as easy as leaving things the way they are. Both AFN and AANDC officials participated in the Bill C-33 consultation process, in the bill's drafting, and both gave it active support. However, the majority of chiefs – and both the Liberals and NDP in Parliament – opposed. This is not likely to change anytime soon. Both AANDC and First Nations leaders have agreed on this (Mendelson, 2014).

6.1.5. Voluntary Incentive-Based Approach






A Voluntary Incentive-Based approach could ultimately affect all First Nation groups across Canada, but depends on whether First Nation bands work up an agreement with AANDC to improve the performance of their respective schools. The main objectives of this approach are to improve the quality of school management and educational outcomes of students via “nudging” of First Nations, without legislation. As perceived by Anderson and Richards (forthcoming), treaty rights trump AANDC goals for reserve schools. Therefore, AANDC's role should be to “nudge” bands with modest

financial incentives,¹⁹ avoid legislation, and arrange that AANDC's seven regional offices undertake some tough collective bargaining (analogous to that between provincial education ministries and school districts) to determine funding levels required for per student comparability with students in schools of the relevant province. In practice, there is no difference between this and the previous option in terms of implementing comparable per student funding. Undertaking this negotiation will inevitably be difficult. It is complicated by animosity over past disagreements. There needs to be more importance placed on shared ownership and making space for students, parents and the local community to partake in these discussions regarding education. The status quo, tripartite agreement, and FNEA to date have not been successful at social cohesion and creating this space.

¹⁹ Financial incentives are defined as the offer of a monetary reward in exchange for engaging in a desired behaviour or accomplishing a particular goal set by Aboriginal communities/schools and AANDC. For instance, financial incentives that reward schools based on improvements in outcomes on core subjects relative to a pre-established benchmark (Richards, 2014; Anderson, and Fleming 2014).

6.1.6. Summary Analysis of Voluntary Incentive-based Option

Table 6.7. Summary Analysis of Voluntary Incentive-based Option

Criteria	measures	Measure & Score
Stakeholder Acceptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acceptability to all stakeholders and policy initiates , respectful engagement, assent, collaboration and dialogue 	Moderate 
Development/Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policy helps build the capacity of Aboriginal students and community and Increases social capital of students in school, and society, and increases political capital of communities and families 	High 
Horizontal Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are financial impacts from the policy likely to increase equity across all groups 	Moderate 
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improves performance in core competencies and meets cultural goals and reflect the objectives of First Nations, parents and educators 	High 
Budgetary impacts and costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Significant increase in AANDC education budget 	Low 

Stakeholder acceptance would be at the local level, so it should be less difficult to attain than trying to attain stakeholder acceptance at the national or provincial level. However, even within the local level differences exists that need to be taken into account (e.g., different goals among AANDC, the First Nation band council, parents, etc.) that will not be easy to iron out. However, it may be possible to reach compromise in most cases if engagement is respectful, and the goals and plans are a result of a collaborative effort between AANDC, First Nations, parents, schools, students and community members. Therefore, a moderate score is given for stakeholder acceptability.

A voluntary incentive-based approach would build the capacity of students, their families and the local community. It would benefit from having both academic and

cultural goals as part of an educational plan that both AANDC and the reserve jointly support. Therefore, the approach receives a high score for developmental capacity and the potential for increases in social and political capital.

In terms of equity, this approach would improve horizontal equality by addressing explicitly the problem of negotiating comparable per student funding between similarly situated provincial and reserve students within a province. Therefore, a score of moderate is given to this approach for equity.

This approach needs to be collaborative, implemented without major legislation, avoid ideological conflicts between AANDC and individual bands, and be effective at improving student academic performances in core subjects, increasing high school completion rates, and at incorporating cultural aspects in school programs and goals. This is an ambitious agenda. At the moment, AANDC has no clearly defined suitable education goals and priorities, and does not clearly understand what the requirements for successful reserve schools are. To be fair, there is a shortage of research and evidence on factors contributing to successful reserve schools, especially on cultural and language factors. Nevertheless, creating a space to have discussions with First Nations about their goals and priorities could foster opportunities for improvement on both core subjects and cultural aspects. Therefore, because this approach includes economic, educational and cultural incentives that could have positive outcomes for both AANDC and First Nation groups, it gets a high score for effectiveness.

As with the legislative option, this option implies significant increases in AANDC budget for reserve schools. Therefore, it receives a low score on the budgetary implications.






In sum, it is uncertain whether AANDC could develop a successful voluntary incentive-based approach through its regional offices. AANDC must “nudge” and not dictate in its attempt to realize academic goals. Inevitably, negotiating per student comparability opens the potential for conflict. AANDC will have to lead a discussion with the 600 or more Aboriginal bands in Canada, abandon authoritarian approaches and become a partner in many small improvement efforts with Aboriginal bands (Anderson, and Richards, forthcoming) that ultimately lead to small incremental change.

6.1.7. Tripartite Agreement

Tripartite agreements involve a much-underplayed stakeholder: the provinces/territories. Under this option the pursuit of First Nations control over First Nations education includes the active participation and support of the provinces. Many participants discussed the importance of working with both AANDC and provincial ministries of education. This option acknowledges the reality that a high proportion of on-reserve students attend provincial schools. Nationally, the ratio of students attending a public school is two fifths; in B.C it is higher. B.C. is the best example of improving First Nation education outcomes with a tripartite agreement. Ideally, under a tripartite arrangement reserve schools can replicate a provincial system while maintaining autonomy. The province's/territory's involvement can result in more funding indirectly, for reserve children studying in provincial schools. This option presumes the existence of an effective encompassing First Nation education organization such as FNESC/FNSA and the Indigenous Adult & Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) in B.C. These are lacking in most other provinces and territories.

6.1.8. Summary Analysis of Tripartite option

Table 6.8. Summary Analysis of Tripartite Option

Criteria	measure	Measure & Score
Stakeholder Acceptability	➤ Acceptability to all stakeholders and policy initiates , respectful engagement, assent, collaboration and dialogue	Moderate 
Development/Capacity Building	➤ Policy helps build the capacity of Aboriginal students and community and increases social capital of students in school, and society, and increases political capital of communities and families	High 
Horizontal Equity	➤ Are financial impacts from the policy likely to increase equity across all groups	High 
Effectiveness	➤ Improves performance in core competencies and meets cultural goals and reflect the objectives of First Nations, parents and educators	Moderate 
Budgetary impacts and costs	➤ Significant increase in AANDC education budget	Moderate 

Tripartite agreements have played a role in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, in B.C. in particular. This option scores moderately in terms of stakeholder acceptance because it usually requires the agreement of all participating First Nations in a province, the provincial government and the federal government. There can be First Nation groups that do not participate in provincial level First Nation associations, and other Aboriginal identity groups are typically not part of the agreement. Differences among First Nation bands within a province/territory may make it very hard to come together and collectively manage and operate a province-wide First Nation education strategy. Many provinces lack provincial-level First Nation organizations with authority to represent adequately all First Nations on education issues.

The option has the potential to build the capacity of the students, communities and institutions involved and impacted by the agreement. A score of high does apply to

developmental capacity. Participating in this agreement would build First Nations social capital and also build political capital in school and jurisdiction, where makes sense, over education. This could apply to students and communities on- and off-reserve. However, not all Aboriginal students and communities would have increased capacity or social capital if they do not participate in the agreement.

Under this option, AANDC and the province/territory could agree on funding arrangements provided by AANDC for schools both on- and off-reserve and develop tuition agreements that have conditions attached to them, such as ensuring that cultural and language programs are provided, making sure the student is at or above grade level, and so forth. The agreement scores high for equity because impacts from the agreement would be spread equally among different groups; Aboriginal students and communities under the agreement would directly benefit. The benefit other Canadian students would gain would be increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture and knowledge in curriculum and pedagogy.

Incremental changes in measuring and improving the performance of Aboriginal students in core subjects, increasing high school completion rates and in cultural aspects are evident in B.C—the province serving as model for this option. If other provinces could replicate BC's encompassing First Nation institutions, they could hope for similar outcomes. However, other provinces may not be as successful in building encompassing organizations. Nevertheless, a tripartite approach would potentially support many Aboriginals students, including those attending a provincial school. A tripartite approach affords more potential than the other options for targeted funding agreements among the three levels of government to develop teachers' education programs that produce a more skilled cadre of teachers. Several interview participants (and most of the literature) advocate that teacher education programs should contain courses for all teachers, wherever they intend to teach, about racism, avoiding low expectations for Aboriginal children, and including the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Richards and Scott (2009) recommend that provinces undertake more aggressive affirmative action to encourage Aboriginal post-secondary students to become teachers, and teacher training programs should require courses in Aboriginal culture/history for all students aspiring to a career as teachers. Therefore, this policy

approach gets a moderate score for effectiveness because it has a reasonable potential to increase academic progress and meet cultural goals that reflect the objectives of Aboriginal communities both on- and off-reserve.

In tripartite agreements, funding is provided by the federal and provincial governments. Therefore, some of the budget and costs to implement this policy approach would likely come from the existing federal budget for First Nation education, same as the status quo but extra expenditure would be needed. For example, AANDC spends an additional 15 million annually on B.C First Nation schools. Therefore, this policy gets a moderate score for budgetary impacts and costs.

In sum, tripartite agreements are the only encouraging policy approach that engages provinces, which have the experience of managing schools. One drawback of this approach is that in existing agreements, securing adequate stable funding has been difficult. For instance, in B.C. a sustainable funding system has yet to be negotiated. This problem could potentially be solved if AANDC would stop dictating lateral objectives such as having an Own Source Revenue clause in the agreement. Nonetheless, the present interim funding system does go a long way towards ensuring financial comparability with provincial school students, and thus allowing groups to work on other important elements of building an effective system.

Chapter 7.

Recommendations

At present, First Nation education is hierarchical, poorly managed, and heterogeneous—it is in dire need of improvements that are co-operative and established in a speedy fashion. This is difficult to achieve because of the history of colonization and marginalization, overlapping jurisdictions, and the reality that Aboriginal populations are not homogenous. There are differences in legal status, location, urbanization, population movement, and the profound belief by many that what has worked in another country, province/territory or local band, will not work in their context.

However, improving Aboriginal education has risen to the top of the provincial and national policy agenda. Evidence of this is seen in the tabling of Bill C-33 and in B.C.'s Tripartite Framework agreement. Based on the scoring of the four policy options, Voluntary Incentive-based and Tripartite Agreement the most likely to succeed presently and should be pursued by policymakers, Aboriginal education leaders, and Aboriginal communities in both public and band-operated schools. How would the two “*highest scoring*” policies work in Canada or more specifically in B.C., Yukon and Saskatchewan and other provinces?

Based on the analysis of the options, and the research findings from the interviews and the literature, the best option for B.C. is a tripartite agreement approach. Provinces that have a high potential for aggregating First Nation organizations, like Nova Scotia, should also consider adopting this approach. As mentioned before, the only province to have done this well is B.C. Policymakers and First Nations in these provinces should introduce additional measures to improve their MOU tripartite agreements.

When I visited Saskatchewan, tripartite agreements were deemed by many with whom I spoke as inappropriate because there is no encompassing First Nation education organization in the province, and this would be a very difficult first step. Therefore, it is suggested that policymakers and all Aboriginal groups in the province pursue a voluntary incentive-based approach. At present, the provincial ministry of education and a number of Aboriginal groups (registered-Indian, non-status Indian, Métis and Inuit) in Saskatchewan are committed to jointly improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. This is evident in the work to implement pilot programs in K-12 public schools based on research from the Seeking their Voices project (Steeves, et al, 2014).

It is suggested that provinces and territories where a tripartite agreement would not work implement a version of the voluntary incentive-based approach. For instance, First Nations representatives with whom I spoke in Yukon indicated the need for Yukon First Nations to have more control over First Nation education in the territory. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation (THFN) and Yukon Government agreement is essentially a version of the voluntary incentive-based approach. This should be pursued and implemented by policymakers and all other First Nation groups in the territory.

Whatever the option pursued, it must include clear and achievable objectives for academic success and cultural goals:

- Pursuit in reserve schools of provincial grade-level performance in either French or English and fluency in a relevant Aboriginal language (as a second language); performance at or above grade level for core subjects such as math and science;
- Aboriginal students are more successful when their culture and traditions are reflected in the curriculum, school, and in classroom instruction;
- Preventing school dropouts is more feasible if a school can engage, support, track, build relationships and connect with the student and family. Attempts should be made to discourage high rates of Aboriginal family mobility during their K-12 schooling because of the adverse effect it can have on student academic success (Turner, and Thompson, 2015);
- Aboriginal stakeholders need to be incorporated into decision-making, and form partnerships with the school, board and/or band council;

- Assessment in the classroom, on teacher proficiency and on programs improves student learning. Key performance indicators need to be developed by Aboriginal stakeholders and AANDC;
- AANDC, provincial governments, or encompassing First Nation organizations should collect adequate data on student performance, disaggregated to the school level, to determine progress and target resources;
- Funding formulas should be pursued that realize, in a workable manner, the goal of per student funding in reserve schools equal to per student funding in a comparable provincial school.

In closing, why would a national approach not work? As I mentioned before, in parallel with Richards (2014) and Anderson and Fleming (2014), the current state of the political environment means that any comprehensive national legislation will not work. I think the prospects for success will be found at the local or provincial level. I recommend the tripartite agreement option and/or the voluntary incentive-based approach. It should be noted that these approaches rely on AANDC being able to delicately and successfully engage with individual First Nations, and achieve a positive response. It is ambiguous whether this will happen, and if it does not happen, we will continue to see high numbers of Aboriginal families migrating into the city for education.

Chapter 8.

Conclusion

This study explored Aboriginal educational improvement, and collected perspectives from educators who work with Aboriginal children, on- and off-reserve, about factors of success, barriers and high priority reforms. The policy problem evident from the research findings is this: **Previous educational reforms have been too slow and not reflective of quality education because of conflicting interests; thus too many Aboriginal students are not completing their Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.** The core conclusion of the study is to pursue a tripartite agreement similar to B.C's or a voluntary incentive-based arrangement. However, better communication and transparency by AANDC is a needed prerequisite for advancing these approaches with individual First Nations. Moreover, it is evident from the research that there is need for further research and evaluation of programs targeted at Aboriginal students (e.g., bilingual language programs) and policies (i.e., tripartite agreement and voluntary incentive-based approach) where they have been adopted to assess their effectiveness and viability in other Canadian provinces and territories at improving academic performances in core subjects, increasing high school graduation rates and meeting cultural goals established by Aboriginal peoples.

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Appendix A.

Semi-Structure Interview Guide



Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Project Title: Examining Factors of Success for Aboriginal students in K-12 Educational Systems in British Columbia., Saskatchewan and Yukon

Principal Investigator:

Ariel Lincez, Masters of Public Policy Candidate, Simon Fraser University

Research Questions:

What explains the successes that occur and what are the barriers in schools that student's face during their K-12 schooling?

What reforms/changes need to occur to help students in the school systems to realize the objectives that parents and teachers want to achieve?

Purpose of Interview:

The purpose of this interview is to gain an overview of successes and barriers faced by Aboriginal students – as perceived by teachers, principals and education administrators.

I am interested in looking at factors for success and at the same time looking at barriers for Aboriginal children and their schools. I hope that speaking with practising teachers and administrators will reveal some widely shared ideas. I'm interested in discussing with school principals what has worked, what has not, and what they think needs to be done to improve educational outcomes among Aboriginal students. I want to compare representative schools in British Columbia (B.C.), Saskatchewan (SA) and Yukon. Additionally, I want to help by writing a report that summarizes what I learn, and to write it in a way that will assist educators as well as draw the interest of Government officials.

Interview Session:

A number of interviews with prominent educators, researchers, academics and administrators will be conducted. These semi-structured interviews will be approximately forty five to fifty minutes in length and will be conducted in person, on the phone, or via Skype video, whichever is more convenient to the individual being interviewed. The interviews will be recorded in notes taken by the researcher. Great care will be taken to guarantee participant confidentiality and to ensure the integrity of the information collected.

Confidentiality and Potential Risks:

Participating in this study is voluntary. At any point you may choose to withdraw.

The results of this study are going to be reported in a graduate research project that will be based on the information collected from interviews. The results and project will be shared with participants. All participants will remain anonymous, due to the sensitivity of this project and to avoid any conflicts or potential harms that may arise. All information will be stored on a laptop that is password protected. If a direct quote is reported from the interview, the participant will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information will be removed from our report. Any written field notes will be stored in a locked cabinet that only the researcher has access to. This information will not be shared with anyone. All entries and correspondence will be destroyed two years from now.

Potential Benefits:

The researcher hopes to assist by writing a report that articulates and explains what has been successful for schools and what they feel needs to be done to improve K-12 educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, and to write it in a way that will assist practicing educators as well as draw the interest of Government officials at AANDC, Provincial Ministries of Education, First Nation educational leadership and organizations. The researcher also hopes that the research and policy recommendations will be valuable information for communities in B.C., SA and the Yukon. The research will hopefully elucidate the barriers and successes across the provinces, and will help in providing information to aid in the further improvement of Aboriginal education. As a study participant, a copy of the research project will be provided.

Ethics Approval:

This research project was approved by the Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board, Simon Fraser University. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experience while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics

Contact for Information about the Study

If you wish for further information about this study or further explanation of the research, you may contact:

John Richards, School of Public Policy, Room 3273, Simon Fraser University - Harbour Centre, 515 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, V6B 5K3

Verbal consent:

Do you agree to participate?

Do you consent to having your answers and perspectives referenced through a direct quote to something said in the conversation in the research project? Please be assured that all participants' anonymity will be guaranteed by masking identities with a pseudonym.

(Researcher will ask if there are any additional requests/ comments)

Research topics and/or questions discussed with participants:

- 1) What would you identify as some of the key successful innovations in your school or school system that have helped Aboriginal students?
- 2) In your opinion, how important is it for a school to offer Aboriginal language and/or cultural and historical programs/services?
- 3) Are there other program/activities for Aboriginal students or program/activities to assist staff who work with Aboriginal students?
- 4) What would you describe as some of the main challenges/barriers facing your Aboriginal students and, in the context of your school, what do you think are the highest priority reforms to address them?
- 5) Do you think it is important for your school or school district to use some kind of test to measure student performance on core subjects (reading, writing, mathematics)?
- 6) How important is it for a teacher to have high expectations for Aboriginal student achievement, attendance and work/personal behaviours?
- 7) Would you say your school receives sufficient funding to provide programs and services to all Aboriginal students? Yes/no
- 8) How important do you think the relationships between the teacher/parent is in terms of academic and personal growth of the students?
- 9) Do you feel that parents of children in the school are well equipped to assist their children?
- 10) What school-level policies and practices (e.g., attendance rules, administrative support, classroom curriculum and teaching style, student academic assessment, etc.) are most important at ensuring a school is effective at improving the success of Aboriginal students?
- 11) Have you read Bill C- 33 *First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act*, or learned about the Bill in a professional meeting, social media or in newspapers?
- If yes, what are your perceptions on the potential effects the main features of the Bill (e.g., statutory funding, Joint Council of Education Professionals, etc.,) would have had?
- 12) In your opinion, how much do you think discrimination among students and staff toward Aboriginal students influences the success of Aboriginal students at schools off-reserve?
- 13) In your opinion, how much do you think discrimination among staff toward Aboriginal students influences the success of Aboriginal students at schools on-reserve?

Appendix B.

Reflexive Analysis

Close to the end of this project, Statistics Canada released regional data tables from the APS (2012). It was judged too late to analyze the data and produce descriptive statistics. I quickly reviewed the data and noted that it was not as extensive of the APS (2006) survey data I used. However, it would require a more detailed review, and if I had more time I would have liked to include it in this project. The semi-structured interviews conducted with participants provided rich data and insight into Aboriginal education, mostly off-reserve and in urban areas. However, taking a critical and reflexive perspective, there are some important points to discuss about the interview process and results. First, timing constraints for the research project and unforeseeable events resulted in a tight deadline to develop the semi-structured interview schedule, recruit participants to conduct the interview, and analyze the data using thematic analysis. If timing would have permitted it would have allowed for research and ethics approvals allowing more interviewees with those that lived and worked on-reserve. Further, I would have liked to extend my scope to include students and their parents. Research constraints (e.g., waiting for ethics approval, gatekeepers, etc.), and sensitivity around First Nation education resulted in some questions not being asked and areas of research not thoroughly explored. This included questions/areas of research on the following:

- Early Childhood Education and impacts on academic success;
- Examples of best practices for cultural based measures;
- Socio-economic factors and their impact on success (both academic and cultural);
- Residential schools;
- The definition of success and holistic education;
- Special needs programs and funding; and,
- Health and Wellness programs and holistic approaches.

Furthermore, after reading the transcript it was clear that more prompts and interjections should have taken place to get the richest data possible to answer the research questions. Most of these limitations could be resolved by performing a pilot study, gaining more experience and having more time.

Experience and practice in qualitative research is something to be discussed because it impacts the type of questions posed by the researcher, and the quality, validity and authenticity of the data collected. More practice interviewing, having an informal approach, where appropriate, and using topics instead of questions, would make the interview more flexible and allow for more discussion. Additionally, research paradigms would have been more clearly identified. For example, at times the interviewer's questions and responses would follow a more constructivist research approach. However, at other times it followed a more positivist approach. Looking reflexively at the

interview, it can be seen that the interviewer moved from paradigm to paradigm and from one identity to another throughout the interviews with participants. For example, at times the interviewer was the 'objective researcher' (objective more positivist approach), or 'the friend' (subjective more constructionist approach), or the 'work/academic/school colleague' (subjective more constructionist approach—triggered by familiarity with being female, a researcher, etc.).