

#2 The Funding Of Aboriginal Education

Proposed by the National Education Committee

RESOLVED, That Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) urge the Government of Canada, and the provincial and territorial governments, to make available the resources and support necessary to provide the Aboriginal population with the same quality, same level of access and funding for education as that provided through the public education system.

BACKGROUND

The responsibility for Aboriginal Education lies with the federal government. Sections 114 and 115 of the Indian Act of 1876 established the Department of Indian Affairs and stated it would “provide for schools for Indians living on reserves with regard to teaching, education, inspection and discipline.” Treaties 1 to 7 also specifically include rights to education. Since under the division of government powers, education is a provincial responsibility, this has caused no end of problems (Carr-Stewart, 2004).

A white paper, the Hawthorne report, in 1967 posited that service must come from the same source for all Canadians and proposed the repeal of the Indian Act, dissolution of the Department of Indian Affairs and the provision of education for Aboriginal people by the provinces. First Nations opposed this strongly but in 1972 they proposed “Indian Control of Indian Education” (McCue, 2003). The federal government accepted this in principle and the government department responsible, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), began the process of devolution and transferred administrative responsibility for on reserve schools to Band councils, but it did not transfer the pedagogical infrastructure to support these schools.

Today INAC funds Band councils and other First Nations education authorities (e.g. school boards/councils in Quebec, education authorities in British Columbia) for Kindergarten to Grade 12, for on-reserve schools (usually primary) and on-reserve children going to off-reserve schools (usually secondary). The latter are usually provincially run, but a few are private, run by First Nations councils (Mendelson, 2008).

INAC supports approximately 120,000 students and 515 schools. Sixty percent of First Nations students currently attend Band council-controlled schools, with the other 40% at off-reserve schools. INAC pays for the instructional services for the on-reserve schools, the tuition costs for off-reserve students, as well as support services, transportation, counselling, accommodation and financial assistance.

In April 2000, the Auditor General of Canada’s report (OAG, 2000) stated that INAC can not demonstrate that it meets its stated objective to meet First Nations educational needs and aspirations and called on INAC to eliminate the achievement gap between First Nations students and those in provincial schools (ibid, Chapter 4.52).

That gap still persists, **60% of students living on reserves have failed to complete high school**, in comparison to 14% of the population as a whole. (Mendelson, 2008, p.1)

The graduation rate is not the only concern.

Standards and student achievement:

In 2004, a study was done by Dr. Mary-Beth Minthorn-Biggs for the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council in Sioux Lookout, which found that students lagged by 2 years or more in achievement on average. Seventy five percent of reserve students arrive in provincial schools, usually when they enter high school, 3 grade levels below (Adequate Resources, 2004).

When checking tables for student achievement, the disaggregated data in British Columbia of BC students attending Band Council schools showed Aboriginal students lagging in all areas (British Columbia, 2009). They had double or triple special needs in the area of behaviour and learning disabilities. In reading comprehension in Grade 4, 29% did not meet criteria versus 16% for non First Nations students; in Grade 7 math, 39% failed versus 20% of non First Nations. These numbers have not changed much since 2001.

Urban First Nations children do better, though children of urban residential school survivors do less well (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Funding:

Funding is based on the Band-Operated Funding Formula (BOFF), something that has not been updated since 1996-1997. This funding, which is based on various agreements (Mendelson, 2008, p.4), is part of the total block funding sent to respective regions. According to the Budget Office, "there are no monies specifically appropriated by Parliament for school funding at any given point in time." (PBO, p.18) There are a myriad of complaints about the BOFF, especially noted in the report of the AFN/INAC Working Group on Educational Cost Factors (Simon, 2007).

Among the complaints and concerns: The federal funding has not kept pace with inflation or population growth (Fontaine, 2009). The First Nations population growth rate is more than twice that of the entire population, 1.43% for First Nations annually versus 0.73% (Sharpe, 2009, p.viii). There are no dollars for libraries, sports, technology and information technology (Fontaine, 2009). The Special Education Program funding is not meeting the needs of the aboriginal children (Simon, 2007, p.10, Adequate Resources, 2004). There is also no oversight of program spending. Block funding goes to regional offices where decisions are made (PBO, p.18).

First Nations are suffering from a gap in funding of \$3000 per student (Fontaine, 2009).

Physical Infrastructure:

According to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO, 2009), only 49% of schools on reserves are in good condition. Since 2006 only 8 new schools have been built (ibid, p.36). Infrastructure capital expenditures are underestimated by 58% (ibid,p.51) or \$179 million(ibid,p.12), maintenance and operating cost by 10% or 11million (ibid. p.52).

In doing its study, the Parliamentary Budget Office found that there was a difference of close to 58% between what INAC was estimating for its capital requirements over the next three years and what the PBO found that it actually required, (ibid.p.12)

Accountability and Direction:

There is a lack of program specific appropriations; lack of capital budget methodology; absence of asset recognition on First Nations books; absence of reliable data and

portfolio wide asset management plans and building conditions. There is no baseline data.

Ottawa withdrew pedagogical and administrative supports when it turned over jurisdiction in 1991. It is ambiguous about its role and responsibilities. Evaluation is lacking; there is no inspection of curriculum or evaluation of quality. Control of education by bands has led to a disintegrated approach to curriculum, some use traditional, some provincial, some a mixture. It needs a national infrastructure and national set of goals. (Mendelson, 2008, McCue, 2003)

Other areas of concern:

The Auditor General's 2004 Report lists concerns as: jurisdiction between federal and provincial governments, geography and demography, i.e. the problems of small schools in isolated regions, poor parental involvement because of the negative view towards formal education, health problems, lack of economic opportunities, racism especially for those attending off-reserve schools, and teacher recruitment and retention (OAG, 2004, Appendix 1).

Add to these: the unrelenting poverty (Richards, 2009; NWAC, 2005), the trauma of the residential schools, and the lack of economic opportunities, especially in the North. Aboriginal children require additional resources in order to attain the same level of success as non-Aboriginals.

Suggested solutions:

Those suggested by the PBO are: change to set funding; fence appropriations to prevent diversion; use a separate budget line for school funding in the estimates (ibid, p.15) so they can be tracked and institute oversight for school infrastructure and program spending.

Those suggested by Michael Mendelson and others include a First Nations Education Authority Act (Mendelson, 2008). Harvey McCue adds to this a guiding direction, pedagogical infrastructure and culturally-sensitive curricula (McCue, 2003).

Access to Post Secondary Education:

In 2006, 23% of Canadians had a degree versus 8.6% of Aboriginals. (Sharpe, 2009)

Funding is provided by INAC through the Post-Secondary Education Program. This is for Status Indians and Inuit, not Métis or non-status Indians and administered by First Nations and Inuit administrators. It is part of block funding and the local authority may apply their local guidelines (Malatest, 2008). Nepotism plays a role.

INAC funding for post-secondary education was capped in 1997 at a 2% increase annually, thus creating a situation where not all eligible students were able to get funded. (Canada. House of Commons, 2007, II.C.3) In 2004, Auditor General Sheila Fraser stated that 9500 students were unable to attend because of lack of funding. In 1995, 27,000 students had been funded, but in 2004 this had dropped to only 23,000 (OAG, 2004 5.74).

While there are other sources of funding from provincial loans to grants and scholarships from a number of other agencies, seventy- seven percent of Aboriginals said that without INAC funding they would not be in a post-secondary setting (Malatest, 2008, p.14). One of the other sources for funding is The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF), which granted \$4.6 million in scholarships in 2009-2009, but they were only able to fund about 27% of applications. (NAAF on-line)

Other factors affecting the use of student financial assistance programs by aboriginal youth (Malatest,2008) are inadequate funding, weak academic background, lack of confidence and role models, racism and lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture, unfamiliarity with funding sources, more are older and married with kids, distance and rural origin.

Added to the individual problems, according to the testimony given at the House of Commons Standing Committee studying this, the 64 Aboriginal-run post-secondary institutions operate on the margins of Canada's post-secondary system, and are funded on the basis of annual applications. They must partner with an established institution if their diplomas or degrees are to be recognized. (Canada. House.2007, B.2.a)

Solutions: Lift the 2%cap on annual increases and base funding on the actual cost. Include special needs such as child care and special housing, indexed annually and with a special catch up fund for denied students and include non-status and urban Aboriginals, as well as Métis in the program. (Canada. House, 2007, Recommendations)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, aboriginal communities experience a greater need for ECE because of the poverty and social problems on reserves. They need more capital, operational funding and capacity development; transportation assistance, respite care; a single simplified application process; modified single reporting requirements and an end to the patchwork of programs from different government departments, a website with best practices and long term, predictable resources rather than project based funding. Federal funding to provinces for ECE should be shared with reserves. (NWAC, 2005)

Benefits of closing the gap

The labour participation rate is directly related to educational level.

If the government eliminates the educational and social gaps by 2026, it would gain \$116 billion in fiscal savings on program expenses and increased tax revenue in that period (Sharpe, 2009, p.v). Currently employed Aboriginals earn less than 29% of what non-Aboriginals earn with 30% of this gap being explained by lack of education (ibid.p.79-80). Having a certificate or diploma raises the employment rate. (ibid.p.22)

The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC)'s Summit on Aboriginal Education held in Saskatoon in 2008 set Aboriginal education as a priority. Through its declaration, *Learn Canada 2020*, it set 2020 as a goal for the elimination of gaps between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in the four levels of education.

Educational success depends on the conditions experienced by the individual related to health, housing, and the ability to meet barriers so we must address the linkages Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations said that "education is the key to turning the page on a dark chapter in our history". Let us turn that page!

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