

# FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS & INUIT EDUCATION

A Report from People for Education

*The key to solving the challenges facing Canada's aboriginal communities is ensuring the education of [our] young people.<sup>1</sup>*

Every year, People for Education conducts an Annual School Survey. Distributed to all of Ontario's 4,900 publicly funded elementary and secondary schools, the survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2012, 1018 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the **2012 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools**.

## URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO SUPPORT ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

There is significant evidence that Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> children—particularly those living on-reserve—are receiving educational services and funding that is markedly inferior to other Canadian children.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone agrees that education is the key to brighter futures, stronger communities and strengthened cultural identities for Aboriginal peoples. But action to ensure that a brighter future becomes a reality has fallen desperately short of what is needed.

## THE CHALLENGES

There are a number of key concerns affecting Aboriginal students, including overcoming the history of residential schools,<sup>4</sup> a strong perception of racism in our schools,<sup>5</sup> few Aboriginal teachers, and an ongoing need to ensure curriculum and pedagogy reflect and incorporate Aboriginal cultures.<sup>6</sup>

To complicate matters, education for First Nations students who live on-reserve is federally funded and administered by individual First Nations. Kindergarten to grade 12 education for First Nations who live off-reserve, and for all Métis and Inuit students, is provincially funded and part of the provincial education system.

## QUICK FACTS FOR 2011/12

In elementary schools where 7.5% or more of the students are Aboriginal:

- the average enrolment is 190 students. The provincial average in all elementary schools is 318 students;
- 17% report that they never connect with Aboriginal organizations; and
- an average of 22% of students have special needs, compared to the provincial average of 18%.

## ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN PROVINCIALY FUNDED SCHOOLS

Of the 65,110 Aboriginal students in Ontario, 80% attend provincially funded schools in Ontario school boards.<sup>7</sup> This includes one-third of First Nations students who live on-reserve. The cost of their education is covered by tuition grants paid for by the federal government and negotiated between individual First Nations and school boards.

Since 2007, Ontario school boards have been supported by a provincial First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework.<sup>8</sup> Under the Framework, school boards receive approximately \$40 million in supplementary funding to support the unique needs of Aboriginal students, based on whether a board has a higher proportion of Aboriginal students (7.5% or more).<sup>9</sup>

To ensure that funding and programming are appropriate, the province has asked school boards to develop voluntary self-identification programs for Aboriginal peoples. Sixty-eight of 72 boards have done so, up from fewer than 10 in 2006.<sup>10</sup>

## UNIQUE FEATURES IN SCHOOLS WITH A HIGHER PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

In 13% of elementary schools, Aboriginal students make up 7.5% or more of the student population. Although almost half of First Nations students live in large urban areas,<sup>11</sup> the schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal students are mostly located in the province's north.

There are a number of unique features in these schools, compared to those with a lower proportion of Aboriginal students:

- The average school size is 190 students, far below the provincial average of 318 students.
- Because funding is closely tied to the number of students in a school, these schools are far less likely to have special education teachers; teacher-librarians; music, physical health and education teachers; or any other specialists.
- A higher-than-average proportion of students are receiving special education support (22%).
- Schools with more Aboriginal students are more likely to connect with Aboriginal organizations, but 17% of schools with more than 7.5% students who are Aboriginal report that they “never” do.

Overall, schools with a higher proportion of Aboriginal students are more likely to have full-day kindergarten, family support programs and on-site childcare for kindergarten and preschool children.

On the other hand, principals in these schools are less likely to report that they have early-intervention activities for writing, and less likely to report that they are successful or very successful in engaging school councils and parents.

## EDUCATION THAT VALUES AND TEACHES ABOUT ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND SHARED HISTORY

In a recent study, nearly two-thirds of adult urban Aboriginal participants reported they learned “almost nothing” about Aboriginal people, history and culture in elementary school.<sup>12</sup> Initiatives such as the Métis Nation Educational Toolkit and related lesson plans,<sup>13</sup> ongoing provincial curriculum review, and increased offerings of Native Studies and Native languages courses<sup>14</sup> may help affirm and support Aboriginal cultures and teach all students about shared histories and continuing relationships.

## FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION ON-RESERVE

Under the Canadian Constitution, the federal government has responsibility for education on-reserve. Since the 1970s, almost all schools on-reserve (just over 90 in Ontario) have been operated by individual First Nations and funded by the federal government.<sup>15</sup>

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**School is a time for dreams and every kid deserves this.**

*Shannen Koostachin, 15, Attawapiskat First Nation*

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Education is a crucial part of the inherent right to self-government of Aboriginal peoples,<sup>16</sup> and “Indian control of Indian education” has been a rallying call for decades.<sup>17</sup>

A number of studies have pointed to massive discrepancies in funding and policy for students living on-reserve:

- A 2005 Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) report showed that instructional expenditures per student for on-reserve education ranged from \$5,500 to \$7,500, significantly below average provincial per-student expenditures of \$6,800 to \$8,400. This gap is magnified by additional cost factors, including remoteness, high levels of special education need and overall socio-economic disadvantage in Aboriginal communities.<sup>18</sup>
- Increases to federal funding for reserves have been capped at 2% per year.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, education funding in Ontario has increased by an average of 4.6% per year since 2003.
- The federal government has no mechanism to relate funding to need.<sup>20</sup> For example, in 2009, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated the required capital cost for schools on-reserve at a minimum of \$287 million, but the federal government budgeted a maximum of \$123 million.<sup>21</sup> At that time, less than half of school buildings on-reserve were in “good” condition, and 21% were “not inspected.”

Most major reviews of Aboriginal education on-reserve<sup>22</sup> have called for the development of legislation in consultation with First Nations. The goals of legislation are to clearly define federal responsibility to provide equitable education, and provide a framework for the development of First Nations educational authorities, which could provide school-board-type services in areas such as special education and curriculum development.

Recently, the Drummond Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services recommended that the province, in the absence of federal action, top up funding for First Nations students on-reserve so that it was comparable to per-pupil funding in provincial schools. The recommendation was disregarded.<sup>23</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Education is critical for the future of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. High-quality, enriched education that builds on the strength of Aboriginal cultures is an important part of overcoming the legacy of colonialism for the next generation.

### People for Education recommends that:

- schools with a high percentage of Aboriginal students have special education, childcare, arts and physical education resources that are at or above the provincial average.
- the provincial government follow the recommendation of the Drummond Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, and, in the absence of federal action, provide top-up funding to ensure that First Nations schools on-reserve are funded at a level comparable to other schools in Ontario.
- schools with a high percentage of Aboriginal students work with Aboriginal organizations to ensure that Aboriginal students and their families have cultural support and role models to support them through school.

## NOTES

- 1 Roberta Jamieson, President and CEO, Indspire, in an interview in the Toronto Star, January 22, 2012, <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1119400-education-would-solve-aboriginal-challenges-advocate-roberta-jamieson-says>
- 2 "Aboriginal" is the term used in the Canadian Constitution to recognize and affirm the existing rights and treaties of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.
- 3 See, e.g., Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. (2011). *Reforming First Nations education: From crisis to hope*. Ottawa, Senate of Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/411/appa/rep/rep03dec11-e.pdf>; National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education on Reserve. (2012). *Nurturing the learning spirit of First Nations Students*. Ottawa, Government of Canada and Assembly of First Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education2/national-panel.pdf>; Richards, J. & Scott, M. (2009). *Aboriginal education: strengthening the foundations*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- 4 See, e.g., Millar, J.R. (1996). *Shingwauk's vision: A history of Indian residential schools*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- 5 See, e.g., Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. (2003). *Urban Aboriginal youth: An action plan for change*, s. 5.1.4. Ottawa: Parliament of Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/372/abor/rep/repfinoct03-e.htm>; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

# NOTES

- 6 See, e.g., Association of Deans of Education of Canada. (2010). *Accord on indigenous education*. Retrieved from [http://educ.ubc.ca/sites/educ.ubc.ca/files/FoE%20document\\_ACDE\\_Accord\\_Indigenous\\_Education\\_01-12-10.pdf](http://educ.ubc.ca/sites/educ.ubc.ca/files/FoE%20document_ACDE_Accord_Indigenous_Education_01-12-10.pdf).
- 7 Ministry of Education, April 17, 2011; See, e.g., Harvey, E.B. & Houle, R. (2006). "Demographic changes in Canada and their impact on education." Toronto: The Learning Partnership.
- 8 Government of Ontario. (2007). *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/fnmiFramework.pdf>.
- 9 Government of Ontario. (2012). *Education funding: Technical Paper, 2012-2013*, p. 45. Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1213/Technical12\\_13.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1213/Technical12_13.pdf).
- 10 Email, Ministry of Education, April 17, 2012 on file with People for Education; *Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead: 2009 Progress Report*. Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/SoundFoundation\\_RoadAhead.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/SoundFoundation_RoadAhead.pdf).
- 11 Statistics Canada. (2008). *Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Census 2006*, p. 12. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/pdf/97-558-XIE2006001.pdf>.
- 12 Environics Institute. (2010). *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study*. Toronto: 190, p. 117.
- 13 For more information, see <http://www.metisnation.org/programs/education--training/metis-education-kitrousses-d%E2%80%99education-metisse.aspx>.
- 14 See note 10, p. 7.
- 15 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, spreadsheet on file with People for Education.
- 16 U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Art. 14. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf); Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Report, vol. 3: *Gathering Strength*. Ottawa. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/RCAP-vol-3-Gathering-Strength-Education2.pdf>.
- 17 National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations. (1972). *Indian Control of Indian Education*. Ottawa.
- 18 Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. (2005). Evaluation of band-operated and federal schools. Cited in Mendelson, M. (2008). *Improving education on reserves: A First Nation Educational Authority Act*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute: 1-23, p. 6.
- 19 See, e.g., Assembly of First Nations. (2011). First Nations funding fact sheet. Retrieved from [http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/2\\_k-12\\_first\\_nations\\_education\\_funding\\_fact\\_sheet\\_afn\\_2011.pdf](http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/2_k-12_first_nations_education_funding_fact_sheet_afn_2011.pdf); Chiefs of Ontario. (2011). *Our children, our vision, our future*. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/COO-Education-Report-Feb-8-20121.pdf>. The Parliamentary Budget Office reports that spending has actually increased by closer to 2.75% annually: see Rajekar, A. & Mathilakath, R. (2009). *The funding requirements for First Nations schools in Canada*. Ottawa: Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.
- 20 See Auditor General of Canada. (2011). *June Status Report—Programs for First Nations on reserve*, p. 13.
- 21 Parliamentary Budget Officer, pp. 10-11.
- 22 See, e.g., note 19.
- 23 Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. (2012). *Public services for Ontarians: A path to sustainability and excellence*. Toronto: Government of Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/reformcommission>



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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