Nurturing Capacity Synthesis Report

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE ON PROCESS, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Indspire

Indigenous education, Canada's future. | L'éducation des autochtones. L'avenir du Canada.

CEO Message

GREETINGS,

From its inception in 2013, to its conclusion in 2019, the Nurturing Capacity: Documenting Community Success program was a key component of Indspire's K-12 Institute. These community-led education projects ranged from alternative education initiatives, extracurricular programs, and administrative-level program shifts. Through Nurturing Capacity, Indspire matched an Indigenous researcher or evaluator with the community program. Nurturing Capacity offered evaluation support to community-led education projects by tracking and documenting project evaluation outcomes. From the evaluation, communities were able to determine if their program worked and how it worked, allowing other communities to learn from their own innovations.

This Synthesis Report incorporates both Indigenous and Western approaches as a way to document and evaluate programs. This report looks back at the lifespan of the Nurturing Capacity program and its individual projects and outlines the collective knowledge on process, outcomes, best practices, and the lessons learned. With researchers and communities working together, this report synthesizes these findings to understand broadly what the 50+ community-led projects have in common and to shed light on what works for other Indigenous communities.

Working in tandem with this report will be an Implementation Guidebook that will inform educators on how to conduct program evaluations and will be helpful in supporting and sustaining initiatives focused on advancing educational outcomes for First Nation, Inuit and Metis youth across Canada.

Indspire is grateful to the Founding Supporter of Indspire's Research Knowledge Nest, Suncor Energy Foundation for its leadership in providing communities with the capacity to positively impact the education experience for their Indigenous youth.

Nia:wen,

ROBERTA JAMIESON
PRESIDENT AND CEO
INDSPIRE

Project Purpose

Beginning in 2013, Indspire's K–12 Institute set a direction that established a range of initiatives to support the improvement of educational outcomes for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students across the country. And for the last five years, Indspire has mobilized collaborations and partnerships to support organizations and educational bodies engaged in reconciliation and innovation initiatives within Indigenous education. Changes to federal funding priorities in 2019 resulted in a review and transformation of both the K–12 Institute and our educational programming and also saw the conclusion of the Nurturing Capacity: Documenting Community Success Program (Nurturing Capacity Program).

The *Nurturing Capacity Program: Synthesis Report* was created to document the outcomes, best practices and lessons learned from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K – 12) programs participating in the program. The report will serve as a community resource and touchpoint for accessing key findings and lessons learned from participants.

The report will also support the development of a guidebook on how to implement and evaluate a K–12 program. Working in tandem, the report and guidebook will help support and sustain initiatives focused on advancing educational outcomes for Indigenous youth across Canada and build capacity for our communities to develop innovative educational programming.

Nurturing Capacity Program

Between 2012 and 2018, the Nurturing Capacity Program supported communities to improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of innovative K–12 practices for Indigenous learners. With research support from the program, communities were able to leverage a standard approach to measure initiatives in Indigenous education.

The Nurturing Capacity Program helped document the types of methods and data involved in the project evaluation, as well as the activities and outcomes accomplished, which, in turn, aided in providing a summary of best practices and lessons learned throughout the process. Through the program, communities were able to define trends associated with educational programs and track student progress both inside and outside the education system.

Ultimately, the program provided communities with the capacity to identify facilitators and barriers to Indigenous education outcomes, and these communities were able to leverage project data in order to positively impact the education experience for Indigenous youth.

DATA COLLECTION

Data guides our decisions in many aspects of our lives, and data collection is a critical factor to the success of any education initiative. Projects utilized a variety of data collection tools in order to document evaluation outcomes, best practices and lessons learned (for example: interviews, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, and administrative data).

EVALUATION OUTCOMES

A key component of the Nurturing Capacity Program was the tracking and documentation of project evaluation outcomes. Each project defined its short-term (change in knowledge, awareness or skills), medium-term (change in behaviour or practice) and long-term (change in condition) outcomes.

Synthesis of Nurturing Capacity Program Projects' Findings

This report includes findings from 59 projects across Canada initiated and completed between 2014 and 2019. Indspire reviewed and synthesized these reports to determine what was held in common and to document these findings.

The Nurturing Capacity Program focused on education initiatives that supported the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students across Canada. Many of the projects focused on more than one student population. Nurturing Capacity Program projects were implemented within elementary schools (kindergarten to Grade 4), middle schools (Grades 5–8) and high schools (Grades 9–12). As seen in our student populations, many of the projects focused on more than one education level.

Projects implemented throughout the country were evaluated, from the interior forests of British Columbia to the sandy shores of Nova Scotia. When we consider the size of student populations within each province, it is no surprise that we see the bulk of the projects hailing from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.

Initiatives evaluated and supported by the Nurturing Capacity Program fell into four distinct categories, each with their own unique approaches and supports:

1. COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Community programs were typically associated with off-campus locations, and they were implemented and operated by an external partner and/or organization. They also focused heavily on providing cultural and social supports.

2. EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMS

Education administration programs concentrated on capacity building and resource allocation for school administrators, as well as on implementing education policy.

3. HIGHSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Highschool programs addressed academic and career planning, with the primary stakeholders being students in Grades 9–12.

4. ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The delivery of elementary and middle school programs was focused on students in kindergarten through to Grade 8. The programs concentrated on intrapersonal and familial supports.

Please see Appendix A and Appendix B for a more detailed description of the synthesis findings and the projects evaluated through the Nurturing Capacity Program.

Best Practices

Along with an overview of evaluation outcomes, project findings also included details on the best practices from their education initiative. Best practices are methods that help guide communities in developing their program and identifying specific resources needed. The key best practices that support communities during the development stage of their own unique project are as follows:

CONTINUED FAMILIAL INVOLVEMENT

Project findings reported that Indigenous students who had strong familial relationships were more actively engaged with the education system. This positively affected students' academic performance and contributed to their increased retention and graduation rates. Family members also served as an access point for cultural supports and teachings, benefiting students' connections to their history and cultural identity.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATORS

Hiring and integrating Indigenous educators within the education system allowed for the increased representation of Indigenous Peoples in this sector. Projects findings cited that the visibility of Indigenous Peoples in educator positions positively affected students' engagement within the classroom and served as buffers for academic resilience. In addition, capacity building for Indigenous educators allowed for the expansion of curriculum programming within schools. This included opportunities for formal education in Indigenous languages, culture and history.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community partners and organizations served as additional resources to enhance the learning experience of students. These agencies provided students with additional spaces and programming opportunities to improve their academic performance and cultural connections. This included tutoring and academic support for numeracy, literacy and language skills, exposure to academic and career-planning knowledge and engagement in Indigenous community events.

ACCESS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

Connection to culture has always been critical to the success of Indigenous students. Project findings identified access to cultural resources as an enhancer of students' academic success, positively affecting their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. Engaging in cultural activities within and outside the education system and accessing Elders inside the classroom supported students in navigating their academic journey.

Lessons Learned

Along with documenting best practices, communities detailed their lessons learned throughout the duration of the projects. Lessons learned are considerations that help support decisions during the development and delivery of the program. Here are the key lessons learned across the projects that will help support communities in avoiding common problems that occur during program development:

BE OPEN TO CHANGE

During the development and delivery of any project, there will be times when changes to this process are necessary. Communities noted that moving from theory to practice saw many adjustments to key aspects of their respective projects. Changes to how the program was delivered, adjustments to the data collection process and adapting to how communities will communicate and engage with students were all found to be areas that may fluctuate. Being adaptable and recognizing the need to adjust how their programs were delivered were important features that project teams credited to their success.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS MATTER FOR YOUR STUDENT POPULATION

Choosing the right data collection tool for your project is affected by the types of students you are trying to reach. Communities noted that knowing the audience was key when planning a project, and using a particular collection tool with some student populations may not work for all student populations. For example, using surveys or questionnaires with middle school students was found to be less effective than using interviews.

INDIGENIZING PROGRAMS INCREASES STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Centring the experiences of Indigenous students throughout their projects allowed communities to increase their level of student engagement. Using inclusive Indigenous language and ways of knowing, training and hiring Indigenous staff, as well as incorporating traditional practices and culture, all contributed to the active engagement of students.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDS YOUR PROGRAM

At the outset of the projects, many communities identified a need to understand their current resources and a capacity to support their implementations. These aspects allowed each project team to focus on key areas, which were critical to a successful program. Some of these key areas included funding and staffing capacity, buy-in from external and internal stakeholders and existing project infrastructure.

Limitations

When positioning the report in the larger context of Indigenous education, several limitations must be acknowledged.

The majority of projects were implemented within urban settings, with very few occurring in rural or remote areas. The urban landscape provides projects with a larger participant pool, existing infrastructure and processes, and a high degree of accessibility for participants. The report was limited in capturing the unique experiences that accompany rural and remote program delivery. These may include the availability of funding and infrastructure, a lack of human resources, and geographic and transportation barriers.

This report also had a limited scope of program delivery for Inuit populations. Although the program was aimed at supporting Indigenous education initiatives across Canada, contributing projects largely targeted First Nations and Métis populations. This highlights the need for future evaluation endeavours to support ongoing education programs engaging with Inuit communities.

Conclusion

In summary, the Nurturing Capacity Program supported communities in developing, implementing and evaluating education initiatives that directly supported the needs of Indigenous youth across Canada. Through the process of documenting project best practices and lessons learned, more communities will be able to build capacity, supporting the rollout of their own unique projects.

Appendix A: Synthesis Findings

Table 1: Counts and Proportions of Projects Stratified by Year (n = 59)

Year	Count	Proportion
2018–2019	8	14%
2017–2018	18	31%
2016–2017	12	20%
2015–2016	14	24%
2014–2015	7	11%
Grand Total	59	100%

Table 2: Counts and Proportions of Projects Stratified by Population (n = 59)

Target Population	Count	Proportion
First Nations	52	88%
Métis	38	64%
Inuit	17	29%
2015–2016	14	24%
2014–2015	7	11%
Grand Total	59	100%

Table 3: Elements, Counts, Proportions of Projects Stratified by Program Type (n = 59)

Program Type	Key Elements	Count	Proportion
Community	External Partner; Cultural Supports	19	33%
Education Administration	Capacity Building; Resource Allocation	16	27%
High School	Academic and Career Planning	12	20%
Elementary and Middle School	Intrapersonal and Familial supports	12	20%
Grand Total	–	59	100%

Table 4: Summary of Short-Term, Medium-Term and Long-Term Project Outcomes

Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Increased knowledge and acquisition of numeracy, literacy and language skills Increased knowledge and awareness of academic and career opportunities Increased acquisition of peer leadership skills Increased knowledge of Indigenous culture Increased sense of cultural identity and connection Increased sense of belonging and safety Strengthened capacity and resources of Indigenous educators	Increased engagement with the school system Increased access to and engagement with cultural supports Increased engagement with peer and familial supports Enhanced application of peer leadership skills Enhanced application of numeracy, literacy and language skills Increased integration of Indigenous community stakeholders within the school system Increased access to post-secondary institutions	Increased attendance rates of students Increased retention rates of students Increased academic performance of students Increased graduation rates of students Increased retention rates of Indigenous educators Increased integration of Indigenous curriculum within the school system

Figure 1: Display of the Synthesis Report Process for Documenting Project Findings

Collation — Process document created — Scan for project reports conducted

Extraction — Project indicators selected — Salient data extracted

Distillation — Desciptive analysis conducted — Trends and outcomes summarized

Dissemination — Synthesis process documented — Project best practices documented
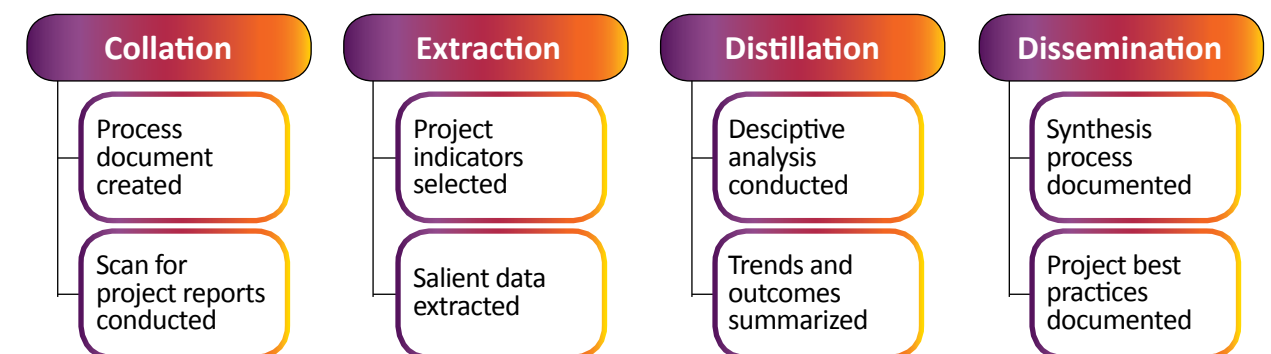
Figure 2: Display of the Proportion of Projects Stratified by Province/Territory (n = 59)
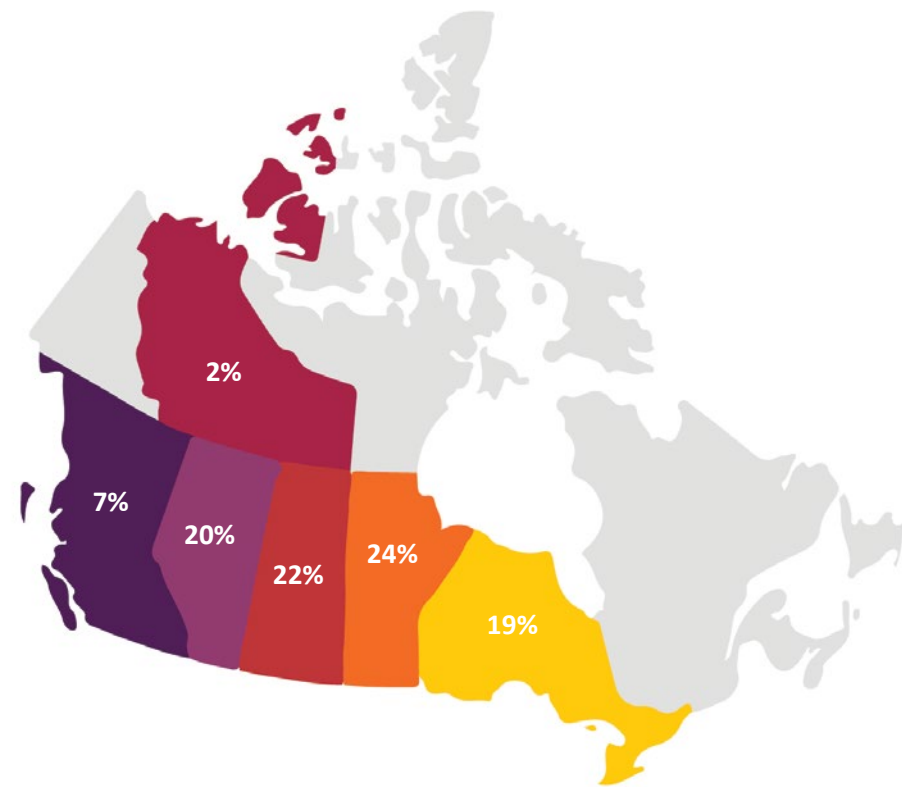

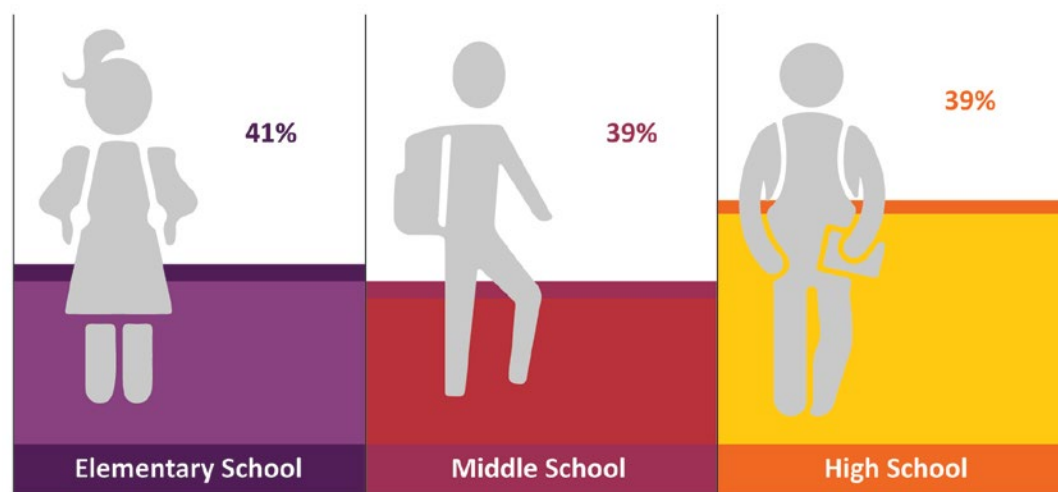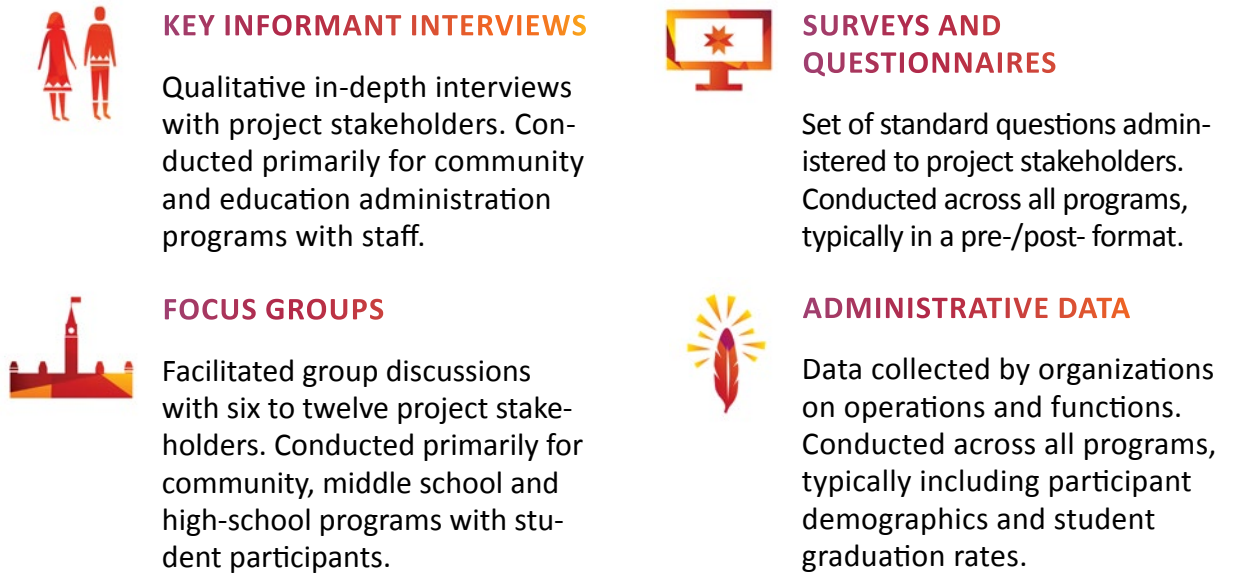**Figure 3: Display of the Proportion of Projects Stratified by Education Level (n = 59)**

Figure 4: Display of the Various Types of Data Collection Tools Implemented Within Projects (n = 59)

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Qualitative in-depth interviews with project stakeholders. Conducted primarily for community and education administration programs with staff.

SURVEYS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Set of standard questions administered to project stakeholders. Conducted across all programs, typically in a pre-/post- format.

FOCUS GROUPS

Facilitated group discussions with six to twelve project stakeholders. Conducted primarily for community, middle school and high-school programs with student participants.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Data collected by organizations on operations and functions. Conducted across all programs, typically including participant demographics and student graduation rates.

Appendix B: Nurturing Capacity Program Supported Projects

Table 1: Community K–12 Projects Funded Through the Nurturing Capacity Program (n = 59)

Community Project	Province	Community
Anishinaabemowin Revival Program Lakeview School, M'Chigeeng	ON	M'Chigeeng
Cats — A Literacy Program Evaluation		
Centre High Campus — Indigenous Transitions Programming	AB	Edmonton
Children of the Earth Medical Careers Exploration Program, Program Evaluation Report	MB	Winnipeg
Collective Ownership of Aboriginal Education, Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools	BC	Nanaimo
Confederation Park Community School: "Kids and	SK	Saskatoon
Écoles publiques d'Edmonton Centre High Campus : programme de transition pour les Autochtones	AB	Edmonton
Elmwood High School Student Success Initiative	MB	Winnipeg
Father Patrick Mercredi High School Nurturing Student Success	AB	Fort McMurray
File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Physical Activity and Wellness Program (PAW)	SK	Fort Qu'Appelle

Community Project	Province	Community
First Nations Provincial Spelling Bee	SK	Provincial
Four Directions First Nations, Métis and Inuit Graduation Coach Approach, Dryden High School	ON	Dryden
Francophone Indigenous Resources Conseil scolaire catholique Providence	ON	London
Geering Up: UBC Engineering and Science for Kids, University of British Columbia	BC	Vancouver
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Indigenous Education Initiative: A Partnership Between Education and Wellness, St. Mary's Wellness & Education Centre	SK	Saskatoon
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Indigenous Education Initiative: Oskāyak "Young People" High School	SK	Saskatoon
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Indigenous Education Initiative: The Development of a Cree Language School and Curriculum, St. Frances School	SK	Saskatoon
Help Me Tell My Story, Riverside Community School	SK	Prince Albert
High-School Graduation Coach Program Evaluation	AB	Edmonton
InBusiness: A National Mentorship Program for Indigenous Youth	NS	Membertou
Kainai High School Student Success Program: Evaluating "The Quarter System"	AB	Cardston
L'Nu Sipuk Kina'muokuom: A Successful Mi'kmaw School	NS	Membertou
Lakedell School Wahkotiwin Project: Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools	AB	Westerose
Leading for Social Justice in Our Schools and Communities: One Story Anti-Racism Education Professional Development, Saskatoon Public Schools	SK	Saskatoon
Learning Academy Program, Kingsway Park Public School	ON	Thunder Bay
Little Red Spirit, Aboriginal Head Start Program	MB	Winnipeg
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Yellow Shawl Housing Program	MB	Winnipeg
Margaret Park School, Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents	MB	Winnipeg
Meadow Lake Early Literacy Project, Meadow Lake Tribal Council	SK	Flying Dust Reserve
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Immersion School	NS	Eskasoni, Cape Breton
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Supporting Student Success	NS	Membertou
Miyo Wahkohtowin Education — école alternative Ehpewapahk	AB	Maskwacis
Miyo Wahkohtowin Education (MWE) Restorative Practices	AB	Maskwacis
Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Ehpewapahk Alternate School	AB	Maskwacis
Mother Earth's Children's Charter School	AB	Leduc County

Community Project	Province	Community
Northern Youth Abroad: Evaluating The Canadian Placement Program	ON	Ottawa
Nurturing Circle — Enhancing Graduation: A Secondary School Support Program for Indigenous Youth, Curve Lake First Nation Education Department	ON	Curve Lake
Ojibwe Bilingual Program, Riverbend Community School Seven Oaks School Division	MB	Winnipeg
On the Land Education, Deh GáhElementary and Secondary School	NT	Fort Providence
Onebillion Math Software David Livingstone Community School	MB	Winnipeg
Programme de culture métisse de l'école communautaire Westmount	SK	Saskatoon
Qeq College Transition Year Project: Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools	BC	Nanaimo
RB Russell Vocational High School Morningstar Program	MB	Winnipeg
Ressources en matière autochtone en français Conseil scolaire catholique Providence	ON	London
Sacred Seven Healthy Relationships Program, Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre	MB	Winnipeg
Saskatoon Public School Division Leadership for Learning Framework	SK	Saskatoon
Seven Oaks Co-operative Vocational Education Program	MB	Winnipeg
Seven Oaks Met School	MB	Winnipeg
Streetfront Alternative Program, Vancouver School Board	BC	Vancouver
The Everlasting Tree School: A Waldorf Education and Kanyen'keha Rotinonhsonni Culture Based Model of Learning	ON	Six Nations of the Grand River
The Lightning Trail — Indigenous Youth Summer Retreat	ON	South Porcupine
The Mother Teresa Middle School: Supporting Regina's Vulnerable Youth	SK	Regina
The Outland Youth Employment Program: A Narrative Study	ON	Thunder Bay
The Pen Pal Project: Children Coming Together in Friendship	ON	Six Nations of the Grand River
The Royal Conservatory, Learning Through the Arts Youth Empowerment Program in the Wood Buffalo Region — After-School Program with the Fort McMurray Catholic School District	AB	Fort McMurray
The Royal Conservatory, Learning Through the Arts Youth Empowerment Program in the Wood Buffalo Region — In-class Program with the Fort McMurray Catholic School District	AB	Fort McMurray
University of Manitoba Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program	MB	Winnipeg
Wayfinders Seven Oaks School Division	MB	Winnipeg
Westmount Community School's Métis Cultural Program	SK	Saskatoon