



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **BRAIDING LEARNING AND HEALING: A PATHWAY TO IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and  
Northern Affairs**

**John Aldag, Chair**

**MAY 2024  
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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**John Aldag  
Chair**

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### **Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons**

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS**

has the honour to present its

## **THIRTEENTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students and has agreed to report the following:





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# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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*As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.*

## **Recommendation 1**

**That the Government of Canada convene a national conversation on the state of Indigenous education with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provincial and territorial governments with the objective of increasing Indigenous graduation rates across the country..... 12**

## **Recommendation 2**

**That the federal government work in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, and that it provide for a mechanism to administer eye exams beginning in early childhood and elementary school. Children need to be able to see properly in order to learn. However, there are many gaps in the health care system, particularly in Indigenous communities, given the lack of access to optometrists in some regions. .... 20**

## **Recommendation 3**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members, leaders and experts to review its funding models for Indigenous early learning, and elementary and secondary education and ensure that they are sufficient, flexible, based on actual needs, predictable and long-term; and that the Government of Canada work with Indigenous people and communities to identify ways to achieve equality and equity in education..... 23**

## **Recommendation 4**

**That within one year of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada update the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to provide an overview of the formats, duration and long-term financial commitments related to the different types of agreements that are currently in place for Indigenous education (sectoral agreements, regional education agreements (REAs), and land claims agreements that address education)..... 24**

**Recommendation 5**

**That within one year of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada update the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on the status of negotiations with the Métis National Council through the bilateral mechanism and/or separate Métis governments or communities not affiliated with the Métis National Council about potential agreement(s) for self-governance in Métis K-12 education..... 24**

**Recommendation 6**

**That the Government of Canada recognize that Jordan’s Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative are not ordinary government programs and that their funding should not be allowed to sunset. .... 24**

**Recommendation 7**

**That the Government of Canada consider urgent, strategic, short-term measures to improve retention rates for Indigenous teachers to ensure quality education for Indigenous students in K-12. .... 26**

**Recommendation 8**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to support Indigenous-led initiatives to revitalize and strengthen Indigenous languages in education in areas under federal jurisdiction. .... 28**

**Recommendation 9**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and the provinces and territories to improve the integration of Indigenous pedagogies and worldviews as well as language-immersive, community-supported, culturally relevant and land-based learning practices throughout curricula and education systems to the extent possible. .... 28**

**Recommendation 10**

**That the Government of Canada collaborate with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, as well as with provincial and territorial governments, to enhance training programs for teachers in the local Indigenous language where they will be teaching. .... 28**

**Recommendation 11**

**That the Government of Canada provide a national framework to deliver appropriate educational opportunities and programs to Indigenous students living in urban communities off-reserve that focus on protecting their culture and their language—which would include access to education and education support—as well as transferring Indigenous knowledge and providing the long-term support that students need throughout their education. .... 28**

**Recommendation 12**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to explore innovative ways to further strengthen housing strategies and to prioritize housing and education infrastructure, including where needs have been identified by Indigenous students as directly affecting education outcomes; and that the government ensure that this housing is adapted to their needs. .... 30**

**Recommendation 13**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories, to address food insecurity among Indigenous children across the country..... 30**

**Recommendation 14**

**That the Government of Canada assess the funding request from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami for a school nutrition program in Inuit Nunangat and report its conclusions to the committee within one year of the tabling of this report. .... 30**

**Recommendation 15**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to explore how to support Indigenous-led solutions in providing mental health, wellness and healing supports to Indigenous students and teachers who are dealing with trauma. .... 32**

**Recommendation 16**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to support the integration of culturally relevant, trauma-informed and Indigenous-led approaches in the education of Indigenous students, using teaching methods that apply a holistic approach to Indigenous education and pedagogies that focus on culture, knowledge and language..... 32**

**Recommendation 17**

**That the Government of Canada develop a strategy, in cooperation with provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments, to identify how to address the crisis in education infrastructure that continues to affect the education of First Nations students, especially on reserve, and Indigenous students in northern communities..... 34**

**Recommendation 18**

**That the Government of Canada work with all relevant governments to determine how to better address systemic racism in the education system and support culturally relevant education, including the shameful legacy of residential schools for students. .... 34**

**Recommendation 19**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, provinces and territories, as well as the private sector, to support internet connectivity and access in northern, remote and Indigenous communities to improve access to quality K-12 education. .... 36**

**Recommendation 20**

**That Indigenous Services Canada respect the agreements it signs with Indigenous communities or the organizations representing them in education matters, particularly regarding the student-teacher ratio, and that the necessary funds to build the required infrastructure be provided to them. .... 39**

**Recommendation 21**

**That the Government of Canada continue to support the sharing of information, lessons learned and promising practices related to Indigenous self-determination in education among Indigenous communities. .... 39**

**Recommendation 22**

**That the Government of Canada develop a strategy on hiring local community members in management positions with a view to ensuring that Indigenous education is overseen by Indigenous people..... 39**

**Recommendation 23**

**That the Government of Canada increase data collection to ensure that Indigenous peoples have access to the information they need to make evidence-based decisions to support education and develop programs that meet the real needs. .... 40**

**Recommendation 24**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and communities to address the inadequacy of federal funding for Indigenous post-secondary education. .... 44**

**Recommendation 25**

**That the Government of Canada work in collaboration with Indigenous organizations and communities to review Indigenous post-secondary funding models and to ensure that this funding is sufficient, flexible, needs-based, and long-term—and therefore predictable; that it work with them to identify ways to increase enrolment in programs offered near their communities; and that it provide for a program that gives them the ability to address exceptional requests so they can obtain the expertise they need in certain key areas to take responsibility for their community..... 44**







# BRAIDING LEARNING WITH HEALING: A PATHWAY TO IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have had their own ways of educating their children and youth. Canada's tools of colonization and assimilation policies, such as Indian Residential Schools and Day Schools, decimated the intergenerational transfer of knowledge in Indigenous communities and their education systems. On 27 October 2022, the House of Commons unanimously agreed that the government must "recognize what happened in Canada's Indian residential schools as genocide, as acknowledged by Pope Francis and in accordance with article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of the United Nations."<sup>1</sup> Today, First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth continue to face poorer educational outcomes, when compared to their non-Indigenous peers, in large part as a direct or indirect result of these genocidal policies. The strength of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, who have begun the process of decolonizing education with Indigenous knowledge, will be highlighted in this study.

Over the years, and in line with its constitutional responsibilities and obligations, the Government of Canada has demonstrated a renewed commitment to Indigenous education. This paradigm shift is happening in parallel with Indigenous communities' own efforts to decolonize education. A massive endeavour is unfolding, and multiple initiatives are underway. We must reaffirm the committee's commitment to the recognition and respect of the rights of Indigenous peoples regarding their languages, cultures, and territories. This study permitted us to formulate recommendations and understand how to better support Indigenous leadership, thereby advancing the well-being of different communities, their knowledge, and values. The academic achievements of young people from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are the cornerstone of a collective approach toward the autonomy of their nations.

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1 House of Commons, *Journals*, 27 October 2022.



On 21 November 2022, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (the committee) adopted the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to examine the existing funding and governance structure of the education system starting with early learning through kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary for [Indigenous people] and provide recommendations to improve graduation rates and successful outcomes for students and on how to close the post-secondary education (PSE) attainment gap; that the committee hear from stakeholders and subject matter experts from all regions of Canada regarding the existing funding and governance structure, and provide recommendations; that the Minister of Crown–Indigenous Relations and Minister for Indigenous Services be invited to provide relevant information from their departments and answer related questions from members; that the committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.<sup>2</sup>

As part of this study, the committee heard from 42 witnesses over seven meetings. The committee also received 15 written briefs from individuals, communities and organizations. The committee wishes to thank everyone who participated in this study. In particular, the committee would like to compliment Inuk student Ella Estey from Iqaluit, Nunavut, and Anishnawbek student Mzhiikenh Rodney Toulouse from the Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation, Ontario, for providing a youth perspective. The committee is also pleased to see an increasing number of Indigenous witnesses speaking in their languages at its hearings. During this study, interventions were made in Inuktitut, Innu, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Oji-Cree, and Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwa).

The committee's study reviewed the education system at all levels, from kindergarten to post-secondary. In this report, the committee will first offer a background on Indigenous education in Canada. A second section will address early learning, as well as elementary/primary and secondary education (K-12); a third section of the report will look at matters related to post-secondary education.

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2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs [INAN], [\*Minutes of Proceedings\*](#), 21 November 2022.

## BACKGROUND

This section provides a summary of the federal role in Indigenous education. It also highlights broad concerns raised by First Nations, Inuit and Métis, with more specific issues being addressed in later sections. Finally, this background section provides a brief discussion of the impact of intergenerational trauma and education.

Historically, education was used as a genocidal tool against Indigenous peoples, most notably through Indian Residential Schools and Day Schools. Today, the right to education is enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*,<sup>3</sup> which the federal government has committed to implementing in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, article 14 of the Declaration states the following:

### *Article 14*

- 1) Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
- 2) Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
- 3) States shall, in conjunction with [I]ndigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for [I]ndigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

There are significant inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across the education system in Canada. As a social determinant of health, education is closely linked to improved social, economic and health outcomes. In the western worldview, it contributes to improved labour market outcomes for individuals as well as greater productivity, economic growth, and innovation for society. It also increases equity and social mobility. The committee wishes to emphasize that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have different pedagogies and philosophies of education. As noted by Lisa J. Smith, Interim Adviser to the President, Native Women's Association of Canada

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3 United Nations General Assembly, [61/295. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), 2 October 2007.

4 [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), S.C. 2021, c. 14.



(NWAC), “Indigenous education is built on the values and practices informed by [I]ndigenous cultures, languages and histories. Passing down [I]ndigenous ways of being provides supports and resources to [I]ndigenous youth to reach their full potential.”<sup>5</sup>

The committee would also like to note that Indigenous education and experiential learning are valuable tools in the development of children and youth. The importance of education goes beyond that of formal education. Karen Restoule, Advisory Board Member at Connected North, explained that

[w]hen you think about [I]ndigenous ways of learning, it really is truly, at the core, experiential. I’m not talking about just kids; I’m talking just generally. Indigenous ways of transferring knowledge are through experiences: kids get to be interactive with their environment, with the folks they’re engaging with.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, education is about more than mere economic development; it has intrinsic value for personal development. For instance, it is crucial that education contribute to maintaining Indigenous languages, cultures and identities.

In its final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada called on the federal government “to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”<sup>7</sup> According to the Government of Canada, steps have been taken “to close the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous [people] at all stages of the education system, from kindergarten through to post-secondary education.”<sup>8</sup> Despite improvements in recent decades, the committee learned that “in 2021, just over 53% of [I]ndigenous students graduated from secondary school,” compared to 90% of non-Indigenous students.<sup>9</sup> With respect to post-secondary education attainment rates, the Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services told the committee that “rates for [F]irst [N]ations, Inuit and Métis were 45.3%, 33.6% and 56.3%, respectively, while for non-[I]ndigenous Canadians it [was] about 70%.”<sup>10</sup>

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5 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (Lisa J. Smith, Interim Adviser to the President, Native Women’s Association of Canada).

6 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (Karen Restoule, Advisory Board Member, Connected North).

7 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2015.

8 Government of Canada, [Delivering on Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#), “[Education](#).”

9 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services).

10 Ibid.

Section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867* provides Parliament with exclusive legislative authority regarding “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.” For the purposes of section 91(24), the Supreme Court of Canada has concluded that “Indian” includes Inuit (1939),<sup>11</sup> and non-status First Nations and Métis people (2016).<sup>12</sup> Education is an area where federal and provincial jurisdiction overlap. While education is under provincial authority pursuant to section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*,<sup>13</sup> the federal government historically used education as a tool to “kill the Indian in the child.” Education was a central part of Canada’s assimilation policies. Between the late 1800s and the 1990s, the federal government together with Christian churches operated a system of residential and day schools across the country for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children.

Sections 114 to 117 of the *Indian Act* still provide for the establishment, operation and maintenance of schools on First Nations reserves. Section 114 of the *Indian Act* stipulates that the Minister of Indigenous Services may enter into agreements concerning the education of First Nations children with provinces and territories. The section does not specify whether First Nations children must be living on or off reserve, but essentially opens the door for the provision of education services for First Nations children by provinces and territories.<sup>14</sup> The *Indian Act* does not apply to Inuit and Métis; the federal government has yet to exercise its legislative authority over Inuit and Métis education.

In terms of elementary and secondary education, the federal government only provides funding for eligible First Nations students ordinarily resident on reserve to attend a First Nations school, federal school, provincial school or private or independent school recognized by the province as an elementary or secondary institution.<sup>15</sup> The operation of schools on reserve is often delegated to the local First Nation community.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, territorial governments receive funding from the federal government, which they in turn use to support Indigenous education. Given the federal government’s role in

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11 [Reference as to whether “Indians” includes in s. 91\(24\) of the B.N.A. Act includes Eskimo in habitants of the Province of Quebec](#), [1939] SCR 104.

12 [Daniels v. Canada \(Indian Affairs and Northern Development\)](#), 2016 SCC 12.

13 [Constitution Act, 1867](#), 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.).

14 Sara Fryer and Olivier Leblanc-Laurendeau, [Understanding Federal Jurisdiction and First Nations](#), Publication No. 2019-51-E, Ottawa, Library of Parliament, 29 November 2019.

15 Indigenous Services Canada, [Kindergarten to grade 12 education](#).

16 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, [Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), 2015, p. 147.



providing funding, the committee would like to highlight the importance of having predictable funding.

Today, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) continues to be implicated in Indigenous education in various ways. At the same time, Indigenous peoples have been actively working to reclaim control over their own education. As a result, the current jurisdictional landscape for Indigenous education is complex and, with the emergence of new sectoral and regional agreements, it is subject to further change. The committee is aware that different levels of government play a role in Indigenous education; however, the committee wishes to emphasize the importance for all governments involved to respect their respective jurisdiction.

Recognizing that Indigenous students should not be penalized by this complex jurisdictional landscape, the committee recommends that:

#### **Recommendation 1**

**That the Government of Canada convene a national conversation on the state of Indigenous education with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provincial and territorial governments with the objective of increasing Indigenous graduation rates across the country.**

### **First Nations**

Today, ISC remains involved in First Nations education, from early learning and kindergarten to post-secondary, through a variety of programs. However, recent audits and an internal evaluation by ISC found that the education system continues to fail First Nations students.<sup>17</sup> A 2018 report by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) notably asserted that the department “did not collect relevant data, or adequately use data to improve education programs and inform funding decisions.”<sup>18</sup> The OAG also found that the department’s reporting was incomplete and inaccurate.<sup>19</sup> In 2018, the committee received testimony from the OAG, the then Department of Indian Affairs and

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17 Government of Canada, *Evaluation of the Elementary & Secondary Education Program*, October 2020.

18 Office of the Auditor General of Canada, *Report 5—Socio-Economic Gaps on First Nations Reserves - Indigenous Services Canada*, para. 5.38.

19 See: Assembly of First Nations, *Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs RE: Indigenous Languages Study*, 27 March 2023.

Northern Development, and Employment and Social Development Canada regarding this audit.<sup>20</sup>

To improve First Nations education outcomes, ISC has recently been engaged in transforming its programming.<sup>21</sup> Among other things, the federal government has been negotiating education agreements, including sectoral self-government and regional agreements, such as the British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement. Angela Bate, Director General of the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNAC), indicated that

[CIRNAC] negotiate[s] treaty and reconciliation agreements with [F]irst [N]ations across B.C., as well as some in the Yukon that are not part of treaty arrangements. In B.C., one of the things we have been working on is a [F]irst [N]ations jurisdiction agreement. Within that context, we're looking to transfer jurisdiction for education to a number of [F]irst [N]ations.<sup>22</sup>

Jonathan Allen, Director at ISC, added that

regional education agreements [are] an opportunity to also take a broader look at self-government agreements, in which there may be other sectoral subjects that come together and can be tied together that way. It's definitely as holistic as we can make it, from what we've learned from our partners.<sup>23</sup>

As ISC indicates in its 2023–2024 departmental plan, the department is aiming to increase “First Nations control over First Nations education.”<sup>24</sup> According to Renee St. Germain, Director of Languages and Learning at the Assembly of First Nations (AFN),

[a]s [F]irst [N]ations gain control over their education systems, we are encouraged to see that more and more [F]irst [N]ations students are completing high school both on and off reserve. In the past five years, there has been a 10% increase in high school attainment on reserve; however, the education gap remains.

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20 INAN, [Evidence](#), 24 October 2018.

21 Government of Canada, [First Nations education transformation](#).

22 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Angela Bate, Director General, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs).

23 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Jonathan Allen, Director, Indigenous Services Canada).

24 Government of Canada, [Indigenous Services Canada: 2023-24 Departmental Plan](#).



With greater funding and control of their education in schools, we remain confident that [F]irst [N]ations will continue to see progress in graduation rates and successful student outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

This 10% increase comes from Statistics Canada census data, which showed that educational attainment (secondary school diploma or equivalent certificate) among First Nations aged 18–24 rose from 43.9% in 2016 to 53.4% in 2021.<sup>26</sup>

According to ISC’s own departmental results reports, however, outcomes have not always been improving on a year-to-year basis. The department reports that 40.5% of First Nations students on reserve graduated from secondary school in 2018–2019; in 2021–2022, that percentage has decreased to 34.2%. In response to the 2018 audit by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, ISC is now using a new methodology to measure graduation rates starting in 2022–2023; as such, new data may not be directly comparable.<sup>27</sup>

## Inuit

Natan Obed, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) explained that education in Inuit Nunangat has been plagued by a “state of neglect,” “underfunding” and a “complete abandonment of responsibilities” by public governments.<sup>28</sup> He explained that “the federal government has maintained that it does not have jurisdiction over any aspect of education in Inuit communities despite exercising jurisdiction within areas of [F]irst [N]ations education.”<sup>29</sup> In Nunavut specifically, Ella Estey, an Inuk student testifying as an individual, argued that the absence of the Inuit language and culture in the curriculum contributes to poorer educational outcomes among Inuit children and youth in the territory.<sup>30</sup>

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25 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain, Director, Assembly of First Nations).

26 Government of Canada, [Appearance before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students, March 6, 2023](#).

27 Government of Canada, [Departmental Results Report 2020-2021](#); Government of Canada, [Departmental Results Report 2021 to 2022](#); and Government of Canada, [Departmental Results Report 2022 to 2023](#).

28 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2023 (Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami).

29 Ibid.

30 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Ella Estey, Student, As an individual).



The committee learned that federal interim and regional funding, similar to what is available for First Nations, was not available for Inuit students. According to Natan Obed, the inability of Inuit to access such funds is “a gap that needs to be fixed.”<sup>31</sup>

Natan Obed also told the committee that “[e]ducation falls outside of the boundaries of most of our land claim agreements, but not all, which then requires us to do more meaningful work with the federal government in the area of K-to-12 education, early learning, post-secondary education and lifelong learning.”<sup>32</sup> In 2011, ITK developed the National Strategy on Inuit Education, following the 2009 signing of the Inuit Education Accord<sup>33</sup> between the federal and territorial governments, ITK and Inuit land claims organizations.<sup>34</sup> The National Strategy on Inuit Education is guided by three key principles:

- 1) Respect for the jurisdictional authority of each region of Inuit Nunangat to deliver educational programs;
- 2) Collective action among Inuit to produce goals of a national scope; and
- 3) Focus on building on best practices and addressing key gaps common to all regions of Inuit Nunangat.<sup>35</sup>

However, no federal funding has been received. According to Natan Obed, “Inuit are one of the fastest-growing populations in this country, and the crisis we still face today in education will only grow if there continues to be a failure to act.”<sup>36</sup>

He reminded the committee that “Inuit do not fall under the *Indian Act*” and that “[m]ajor legislative and policy gaps continue to limit access to a quality education for Inuit students.”<sup>37</sup> While there is now a permanent bilateral mechanism between the government and Inuit in the form of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee that has

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31 INAN, *Evidence*, 15 February 2023 (Natan Obed).

32 Ibid.

33 *Inuit Education Accord*, signatories: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; Minister of Education, Government of Nunavut; Makivik Corporation; Nunatsiavut Government; Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.; Inuvialuit Regional Corp.; Minister of Education, Government of Northwest Territories; Pauktuutit; National Inuit Youth Council; and Inuit Circumpolar Council-Canada, 2009.

34 INAN, *Evidence*, 15 February 2023 (Natan Obed).

35 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education*, 2011, p. 69.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.



identified matters related to education as priorities, Natan Obed stated that “we are still struggling with that basic idea of what is possible [within the Crown-Inuit Partnership Committee] and the extent to which the federal government is willing to put itself in a difficult scenario for Inuit children.”<sup>38</sup>

## Métis

During this study, Cassidy Caron, President of the Métis National Council (MNC), noted that “historically neither federal nor provincial governments have wanted to assume jurisdictional responsibility for Métis, especially with regards to education.”<sup>39</sup> She explained that the factors relating to lower educational achievement and academic performance for Métis people compared to non-Indigenous people include “systemic discrimination, poverty and cultural dislocation.”<sup>40</sup> Consequences of these disparities include “limited employment opportunities and lower incomes, higher crime rates, and poorer health and mortality outcomes.”<sup>41</sup> She told the committee that “[a]ddressing these disparities requires recognizing and addressing systemic barriers to Métis education as well as promoting culturally responsive education that recognizes the unique realities of Métis families and values Métis culture and knowledge.”<sup>42</sup>

To improve education outcomes for Métis students, Cassidy Caron advocated for “Métis-specific education programs” with long-term, stable funding:

As of today, Métis control of Métis K-to-12 education remains an elusive goal. Even the ability to influence the system to support Métis students continues to be a challenge. For example, the development of a Métis-specific program for K-to-12 education lags far behind similar programs for other [I]ndigenous peoples. Métis education infrastructure is almost non-existent in the major metropolitan areas within the homeland. Métis educational resources are often made possible only by diverting resources away from other program areas.<sup>43</sup>

She indicated that in 2023, the permanent bilateral mechanism between MNC and Canada has been working toward a 10-year K-12 education accord: “Ultimately... we

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38 Ibid.

39 INAN, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2023 (Cassidy Caron, President, Métis National Council).

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

believe Métis educational outcomes can and will be improved through the recognition of the inherent Métis right to self-government and Métis control over Métis education.”<sup>44</sup>

The committee would like to highlight the fact that Bill C-53, An Act respecting the recognition of certain Métis governments in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan, to give effect to treaties with those governments and to make consequential amendments to other Acts,<sup>45</sup> was reported back to the House of Commons in early February 2024. As its title indicates, this bill would provide for the recognition of certain Métis government in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan. If passed, there could be implications for Métis education.

## The Impact of Intergenerational Trauma

Between the late 1800s and the 1990s, the Government of Canada used education as a tool to erase the cultures and identities of Indigenous peoples, through a system of residential and day schools, the goal of which was to “kill the Indian in the child.” In 2008, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, then Prime Minister of Canada, apologized to Indigenous peoples on behalf of Canadians for the great harm caused by this system. He also explicitly recognized that the “[t]wo primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.”<sup>46</sup> In 2022, the House of Commons unanimously recognized that the residential school system had been a form of genocide.<sup>47</sup>

The experience of residential and day schools has contributed to intergenerational trauma, which continues to affect Indigenous peoples in various ways:

The infliction of trauma, as a result of the experience of colonization, is in the DNA of [I]ndigenous people in this country. It for sure impacts the capacity of people to learn, and it for sure impacts their capacity to stay and focus in school... It intersects with the shortage of housing and with the many other ways [I]ndigenous people experience poverty in communities all across this country.<sup>48</sup>

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44 Ibid.

45 [Bill C-53, An Act respecting the recognition of certain Métis governments in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan, to give effect to treaties with those governments and to make consequential amendments to other Acts](#), 44th Parliament, 1st Session.

46 Government of Canada, [Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools](#).

47 House of Commons, [Journals](#), 27 October 2022.

48 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).



Renee St. Germain from the AFN explained that “[t]he history of colonization, residential institutions, the sixties scoop and the imposition of federal and provincial laws and policies have had devastating consequences on [F]irst [N]ations children and families, their languages, education and social structures.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Lisa J. Smith stated that “the legacy of residential schools continues to impact our youth [and] that is why all services, educational or otherwise, must be trauma informed.”<sup>50</sup>

The committee recognizes that while this trauma does not define Indigenous peoples, past trauma continues to have effects on Indigenous students and their journey through the education system. The committee was encouraged to learn that Indigenous institutions, such as the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), are working to “unburden those traumas” by “braid[ing] our learning with healing.”<sup>51</sup> Elder David Rattray, a retired teacher testifying as an individual, explained the importance of breaking the taboos around trauma. Helen Bobiwash, accountant for the Kinooamaadziwin Education Body, agreed: “If we can lift the spirits of our students so that they feel good about themselves and about their family and about where they are at this point in time with the resources they have, that to me is the start of success.”<sup>52</sup>

Elder David Rattray also stressed the need to respond to the emotional needs and safety of Indigenous students, notably by creating belonging and culturally rich environments:

I call it bicultural education. It’s the ability to teach someone to walk in two worlds. I can go out and hunt moose in snowshoes that I made, kill a moose, drag it back in, prepare it and tan the hide. I can do all that stuff, but I can also apply for a \$300,000 grant and nail it. That’s bicultural. I’m walking in both worlds.<sup>53</sup>

## EARLY LEARNING, AND ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

This section of the report provides an overview of the testimony heard with respect to K-12 education. It also makes a series of recommendations to the Government of Canada on ways to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students. Recurring themes during the study were the importance of early learning, funding, recruitment and retention of teachers, infrastructure, language and culture, housing, food security,

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49 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).

50 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (Lisa J. Smith).

51 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant, President, First Nations Technical Institute).

52 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (Helen Bobiwash, Accountant, Kinooamaadziwin Education Body).

53 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (David Rattray, Retired Teacher, As an individual).

wraparound supports, distance learning and self-determined education programming and services.

## Early Learning

Witnesses emphasized the importance of early learning programs and services and the continued funding as part of what was called the “continuum of education.”<sup>54</sup> As Nikki Osborne, Teacher and Graduation Coach at Keewatinook Internet High School, told the committee:

We shouldn’t be playing catch-up. Let’s help students at the right age, at those early ages, so that they experience success early. It’s not fair for these students to go through their entire schooling career with huge gaps. They internalize these failures. It’s so much harder for them. It’s not fair. It’s not right. I promise that if we invest early in childhood education, and if we offer supports to families that are struggling, that will make a huge difference in these statistics and in the lives of these students and their families.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas Sierzycki, Northern Education Advisor with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, identified early learning as “an area for critical investment,” noting that “numerous studies have indicated [that] strategic investments in early childhood development have significant societal and financial gains.”<sup>56</sup>

According to Professor Catherine Cook, Vice-President, Indigenous, at the University of Manitoba,

[t]he federal government has a responsibility to invest in developing a continuum of education and to support capital investment for training and education opportunities. The continuum requires a commitment for a fulsome partnership with school divisions; tribal councils; post-secondary institutions; provincial, federal and [I]ndigenous governments; and partners in industry and philanthropy.<sup>57</sup>

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54 INAN [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023, Dr. Catherine Cook (Vice-President, Indigenous, University of Manitoba).

55 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Nikki Osborne, Teacher and Graduation Coach, Keewatinook Internet High School).

56 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 March 2023 (Thomas Sierzycki, Northern Education Advisor, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education).

57 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook, Vice-President, Indigenous, University of Manitoba).



## Recommendation 2

**That the federal government work in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, and that it provide for a mechanism to administer eye exams beginning in early childhood and elementary school. Children need to be able to see properly in order to learn. However, there are many gaps in the health care system, particularly in Indigenous communities, given the lack of access to optometrists in some regions.**

### Funding for K-12 Education

The committee heard from Minister Hajdu that, since 2016, the Government of Canada has worked toward creating new partnerships with Indigenous people “to reform the way elementary and secondary school education was funded.”<sup>58</sup> Provincial education formulas were set as “the new minimum base,” with “modifications that addressed specific [F]irst [N]ations’ needs and priorities.”<sup>59</sup> Minister Hajdu reported that federal funding for First Nations students on reserve has increased by 74% since 2015.<sup>60</sup>

Since 2019, under the co-developed “transformative approach,” core funding for First Nations elementary and secondary education is provided by ISC through “interim regional formulas that reflect student enrolment and provincial comparability, plus adaptations and enhanced funding beyond provincial comparability,”<sup>61</sup> which may include full-day kindergarten for students aged four and five, additional funding for language and culture, and before and after school programming. The interim funding allows for the negotiation of regional agreements on self-government for First Nations in education and for their implementation, and it is tailored to specific needs.”<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Allen, ISC Director stated before the committee:

The department’s funding formula in each region with [F]irst [N]ations on reserve adds to that funding, because our studies and our partners tell us how fundamentally important it is for them to see their language and culture reflected in curriculum.

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58 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Government of Canada, *Appearance before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, March 6, 2023.

62 Ibid.

Learning their language creates more of an attachment to school, to participation, to perseverance and to future post-secondary attachment.<sup>63</sup>

Multiple witnesses who had benefited from interim funding, as well as Minister Hajdu, spoke of the expected benefits of longer-term funding being available to support First Nations education, as this allowed for more self-determination governance in education. At the same time, witnesses also referred to the limitations of previously used short-term, project-based funding.<sup>64</sup> The Chiefs of Ontario asked for the committee to support a pilot project funding request that it had submitted to Indigenous Services Canada:

[The project will] fully explore the impacts of and remedies to systemic gaps in the provincial and First Nation education systems. The objectives of the pilot project are to conduct the exploration in a responsive, adaptive and iterative way and to conduct a thorough analysis of factors inhibiting student success through community engagement and involvement.<sup>65</sup>

Minister Hajdu reported progress on K-12 education, indicating that funding for on-reserve First Nations students was now at least comparable to students in provincial education systems.<sup>66</sup> According to Minister Hajdu, funding for Jordan's Principle and the supports provided under it also contribute to student retention in school systems.<sup>67</sup> Named after Jordan River Anderson of the Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, Jordan's Principle is an initiative aimed at ensuring that "all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them."<sup>68</sup> In 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal defined Jordan's Principle as follows:

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63 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023, (Jonathan Allen, Director, Department of Indigenous Services).

64 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu); INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Blair Gould, Executive Director, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey); INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Kelsey Wrightson, Executive Director, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning), INAN, *Evidence*, March 8, 2023, Renee St. Germain, Director at AFN, INAN, Brief, *Chiefs of Ontario*.

65 INAN, *Brief*, April 6, Chiefs of Ontario, 2023.

66 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).

67 Ibid. The Government of Canada website on [Jordan's Principle](#) explains that :  
Jordan's Principle makes sure all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including the unique needs that First Nations Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA children and youth and those with disabilities may have.

Jordan's Principle is named in memory of Jordan River Anderson. He was a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba.

68 Government of Canada, [Jordan's Principle](#).



Jordan's Principle provides that where a government service is available to all other children, but a jurisdictional dispute regarding services to a First Nations child arises between Canada, a province, a territory, or between government departments, the government department of first contact pays for the service and can seek reimbursement from the other government or department after the child has received the service. It is a child-first principle meant to prevent First Nations children from being denied essential public services or experiencing delays in receiving them. On December 12, 2007, the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion that the government should immediately adopt a child-first principle, based on Jordan's Principle, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children.<sup>69</sup>

Jordan's Principle applies only to First Nations children and youth under the age of majority in their province or territory of residence. However, similar requests for access to essential government funded health, social and educational products, services and supports can be made by Inuit through the Inuit Child First Initiative.<sup>70</sup> Whereas Jordan's Principle is described by the government as a "legal principle", the Inuit Child First Initiative is a program.

Progress can also be attributed to regional education agreements.<sup>71</sup> According to Renee St. Germain with the AFN,

First [N]ations across the country remain resilient and committed to asserting their jurisdiction and control over their education systems. With nine completed and signed transformative education agreements, [REAs] there's an estimated 30% of [F]irst [N]ations receiving equitable funding that meets their specific needs and circumstances.<sup>72</sup>

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69 Government of Canada, [\*Definition of Jordan's Principle from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal\*](#).

70 Government of Canada, [\*Supporting Inuit Children\*](#).

71 As explained by the Government of Canada's [\*Education Partnerships Program: Regional Education Agreement Component: National Program Guidelines 2023 to 2024\*](#):

The development of a REA is optional. First Nations may choose to develop a REA to facilitate greater control of education through education systems they design. The REA can formalize First Nations-determined distribution of core education funding, for example, education service map in accordance with the Elementary and Secondary Education Program's kindergarten to grade 12 terms and conditions and provide funding stability and predictability in support of the delivery of elementary and secondary education.

REAs can be based on the current interim regional funding formula allocations or can be based on funding levels beyond the interim regional funding formula allocations in order to improve student outcomes not achievable with the interim regional funding formula allocations.

72 INAN, [\*Evidence\*](#), 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).



During this study, most witnesses advocated for increased, predictable, sustainable and long-term federal funding to support Indigenous K-12 education.<sup>73</sup> For example, the AFN recommended an increase in funding over the next five years for education agreements “that provide greater jurisdiction and self-determination for First Nations.”<sup>74</sup>

The committee also heard from Leslee White-Eye, Governance Director of the First Nations with Schools Collective, who told the committee that the Collective had developed its own “distinctions-based First Nation education funding parity plus model”:

Because of the long-standing historical, cultural and uniquely geopolitical circumstances that are [F]irst [N]ation-Canada relations, provincial governments have no jurisdiction over our governing affairs as such, yet Canada has tied [F]irst [N]ation education funding inextricably to provincial formulas beginning in 2019 with its interim funding approach.<sup>75</sup>

Irene Oakes, Project Specialist at Headwater Learning Solutions, similarly stated that:

Because of historical injustices perpetuated on [F]irst [N]ations peoples and communities, there were, and continue to be, many complexities that challenge the delivery of effective education programming. The resources required to best address these complexities far exceed current funding models, predicated on provincial comparability. Targeted needs-based funding continues to be required.<sup>76</sup>

Based on the testimony received, the committee recommends:

### **Recommendation 3**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members, leaders and experts to review its funding models for Indigenous early learning, and elementary and secondary education and ensure that they are sufficient, flexible, based on actual needs, predictable and long-term; and that the Government of Canada work with Indigenous people and communities to identify ways to achieve equality and equity in education.**

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73 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Kelsey Wrightson); INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Shelagh Rowles, Provost and Vice-President Academic, Yukon University).

74 Assembly of First Nations, *Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN) RE: Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, 27 March 2023.

75 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Leslee White-Eye, Governance Director, First Nations with Schools Collective).

76 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Irene Oakes, Project Specialist, Headwater Learning Solutions).



#### **Recommendation 4**

**That within one year of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada update the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to provide an overview of the formats, duration and long-term financial commitments related to the different types of agreements that are currently in place for Indigenous education (sectoral agreements, regional education agreements (REAs), and land claims agreements that address education).**

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That within one year of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada update the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on the status of negotiations with the Métis National Council through the bilateral mechanism and/or separate Métis governments or communities not affiliated with the Métis National Council about potential agreement(s) for self-governance in Métis K-12 education.**

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That the Government of Canada recognize that Jordan’s Principle and the Inuit Child First Initiative are not ordinary government programs and that their funding should not be allowed to sunset.**

### **Recruitment and Retention of K-12 Teachers**

The committee heard about the importance of recruiting and retaining K-12 teachers, in particular Indigenous teachers. The challenge of recruitment is closely linked to funding. As Blaire Gould, Executive Director at Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, told the committee, “[o]ne area that we would wish increased funding for is, of course, wage parity for our teachers. That retains them and allows us to grow our system and not compete with the public school system.”<sup>77</sup> According to Thomas Sierzycki, teacher recruitment and retention is an area of critical investment to improve Indigenous education.<sup>78</sup> He explained that

It is well understood that teachers learning in their respective communities have a higher success rate and are more inclined to stay and teach in the communities they call

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77 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Blair Gould).

78 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 March 2023 (Thomas Sierzycki).

home. When [I]ndigenous, northern and Métis students see that their teachers are just like them, this creates an atmosphere of trust, pride and success.<sup>79</sup>

Rebecca Mearns, President of Nunavut Arctic College, explained:

When I was going through high school and ... the system in Nunavut, we'd often have teachers come from outside of the territory. Some would stay for a long time. Some would stay for a year or two. Turnover really impacts how children are building relationships within their classrooms and those connections with their teachers.<sup>80</sup>

Sylvia Davis, Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation in Northwestern Ontario, also indicated that maintaining a high teacher retention rate “is critical for building strong relationships between teachers and students.”<sup>81</sup> According to Professor Shelagh Rowles, Provost and Vice-President of Yukon University, “in some communities the teacher shortage has become so acute that people who haven’t finished their full teaching qualification are hired as teachers.”<sup>82</sup> Nikki Osborne also noted that the “turnover of non-local teachers is an issue.”<sup>83</sup>

Minister Hajdu recognized that “the relationship between students and teachers is an important part of outcomes” and agreed that the high turnover was a challenge, especially in remote communities.<sup>84</sup> Irene Oakes spoke about a partnership between her organization, Headwater Learning Solutions, and the Thunderchild First Nation in Saskatchewan and its impacts on teacher retention:

At the end of the Thunderchild partnership, measurable success was present at every level. Eighty per cent of teachers demonstrated improved urgency, intentionality and rigour in the planning and delivery of their classes. With the development of culturally based guiding principles, which we call PISIM at Thunderchild, Thunderchild traditions, ceremonies, values and the Cree language were infused daily into the school and into the classrooms. The result was that student participation and engagement increased substantially. Nearly 70% of students were able to close their three- to five-year learning gaps in foundational reading and numeracy skills. This increased student success also fuelled increased teacher confidence and competence. The school was successful in

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79 Ibid.

80 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns, President, Nunavut Arctic College).

81 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis, Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation).

82 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Shelagh Rowles).

83 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Nikki Osborne).

84 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).



retaining 75% of its staff for the length of the project, which is a substantial improvement to the high teacher turnover of the past.<sup>85</sup>

Recruiting and retaining teachers in Indigenous communities is a challenge. However, what the committee learned is that achieving these goals would contribute to positive outcomes for students; in turn, such positive outcomes are also likely to improve teacher retention. Teachers need to be better supported and resourced in order to respond to Indigenous students' needs.

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends:

### **Recommendation 7**

**That the Government of Canada consider urgent, strategic, short-term measures to improve retention rates for Indigenous teachers to ensure quality education for Indigenous students in K-12.**

## **Importance of Indigenous Pedagogies, Worldviews, Languages and Cultures, and Land-Based Education**

Almost all witnesses emphasized the importance of using Indigenous languages, cultures and land as tools in education. Many mentioned that better education outcomes were linked to receiving Indigenous education provided in immersion programs in Indigenous languages. Witnesses also told the committee that education in Indigenous languages, and the connection with their Indigenous cultures, communities, traditions and worldviews, were other factors that supported educational success for Indigenous students. Indigenous languages were also highlighted as important for Indigenous students' well-being and mental health.

According to Lisa J. Smith, “[w]e cannot discuss educational rates without discussing [I]ndigenous language revitalization. Indigenous languages contain our world views, our cultures and our identities, which oftentimes are intersecting.”<sup>86</sup>

In a brief submitted to the committee, Mzhiikenh Rodney Toulouse, a First Nation student, wrote that:

Learning about my Indigenous language, culture and spirituality is important because it helps me to feel better, to connect with my culture, and to earn credits in subjects I can

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85 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Irene Oakes).

86 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (Lisa J. Smith).

relate to... More courses are needed so that we can learn more detailed information about our language, culture, and spirituality. I wish that I could have spent more time out of the classroom and on the land, where I could have connected with the environment.<sup>87</sup>

In her brief, Professor Marie Battiste, Special Advisor to the Vice President Academic, Provost on Decolonizing the Academy, Cape Breton University, wrote about Canada-wide research. Her research revealed that:

Success for each of the 3 Indigenous groups meant that learning was holistic, life-long, experiential, communally-activated, grounded in language and cultures of the communities, from their land, involving their spiritual relational worldviews and growing roles and responsibilities in those places with their ecology, and included the diverse knowledge systems of both Indigenous peoples and Euro-western Canadians.

Today, like it was then, Indigenous Peoples have not changed in their aspirations for how their own ways of knowing, languages, cultural and traditions can and should be sustained.<sup>88</sup>

According to a brief submitted by the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, a land-based education initiative, “Indigenous land-based education is not just another form of ‘outdoor education’—it is a critical component of nation-building, political and cultural resurgence, decolonization, and addressing gender-based violence.”<sup>89</sup> Their brief continued:

In the literature, land-based education is associated with improved academic and career outcomes and connections for Indigenous students. These programs offer Indigenous students a learning environment that is safe, supportive, culturally-relevant, and applicable to their own lives and this, in turn, improves student perspectives and experiences of education which leads to higher numbers of students connecting with further post-secondary education or different career goals.<sup>90</sup>

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87 Mzhiikenh Rodney Toulouse, [\*Brief on Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students\*](#), Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 17 April 2023.

88 Marie Battiste, [\*Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs\*](#), 27 March 2023.

89 Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, [\*Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning: Standin Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs House of Commons Canada Submission\*](#), Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 31 March 2023.

90 Ibid.



Similarly, Karen Restoule noted that “Indigenous ways of transferring knowledge are through experiences: kids get to be interactive with their environment, with the folks they’re engaging with.”<sup>91</sup>

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to support Indigenous-led initiatives to revitalize and strengthen Indigenous languages in education in areas under federal jurisdiction.**

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and the provinces and territories to improve the integration of Indigenous pedagogies and worldviews as well as language-immersive, community-supported, culturally relevant and land-based learning practices throughout curricula and education systems to the extent possible.**

#### **Recommendation 10**

**That the Government of Canada collaborate with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, as well as with provincial and territorial governments, to enhance training programs for teachers in the local Indigenous language where they will be teaching.**

#### **Recommendation 11**

**That the Government of Canada provide a national framework to deliver appropriate educational opportunities and programs to Indigenous students living in urban communities off-reserve that focus on protecting their culture and their language—which would include access to education and education support—as well as transferring Indigenous knowledge and providing the long-term support that students need throughout their education.**

### **Impact of Socio-Economic Inequalities**

Witnesses raised concerns about the high levels of food insecurity and the lack of adequate housing in many Indigenous communities, identifying them as barriers to

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91 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (Karen Restoule).

education. In 2021, the committee presented a report in which it identified the negative impact of food insecurity on educational outcomes.<sup>92</sup>

With regard to food insecurity for instance, Rebecca Mearns told the committee that:

[M]any of our students are reliant upon student funding, student financial assistance, while they're attending school. ... [T]he cost of living continues to increase and the cost of food continues to increase, so when you're living with a family in a smaller community where those food costs are so high, we're trying to ensure we have those supports available for them [the host families] too.<sup>93</sup>

She later added that:

[I]f you are food insecure, if you have other issues going on within the home, that's impacting your life at school...and that's where we need more funding within the college, within our schools, within our communities overall.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, Natan Obed, referring to a high degree of food insecurity in the North, informed the committee that a pre-budget submission by ITK had been prepared in 2023. That submission included a 15-year proposal for a school food program for Inuit students. He hoped that the government would consider funding ITK's proposal.<sup>95</sup>

The committee also heard from witnesses that there were multiple ways that inadequate housing was affecting education for Indigenous students. For instance, there is a reported lack of housing for teachers; many Indigenous students are dealing with overcrowded housing, which negatively affects their ability to learn; and the high cost of housing in urban areas has a negative impact on the well-being of Indigenous post-secondary students.<sup>96</sup>

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92 INAN, *Food Security in Northern and Isolated Communities: Ensuring Equitable Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for All*, 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session, June 2021. This report was presented again in the 44th Parliament in order to receive a [response from the government](#).

93 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns).

94 Ibid.

95 INAN, *Evidence*, 15 February 2023 (Natan Obed).

96 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen, Co-Chair, National Indigenous Advocacy Committee, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations); INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Ella Estey).



Based on the testimony, the committee recommends the following:

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to explore innovative ways to further strengthen housing strategies and to prioritize housing and education infrastructure, including where needs have been identified by Indigenous students as directly affecting education outcomes; and that the government ensure that this housing is adapted to their needs.**

#### **Recommendation 13**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories, to address food insecurity among Indigenous children across the country.**

#### **Recommendation 14**

**That the Government of Canada assess the funding request from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami for a school nutrition program in Inuit Nunangat and report its conclusions to the committee within one year of the tabling of this report.**

### **Mental Health, Well-Being, and Healing**

Many witnesses advocated for better mental health supports throughout the education system to help First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in their journey. In a brief submitted to the committee, Mzhiikenh Rodney Toulouse, a First Nation student, wrote that “more needs to be done for Indigenous students to help us to deal with the mental health issues that we live with... Special mental health services are needed for students to support us right away when we need help.”<sup>97</sup>

José-Tomás Arriola, Clinical Supervisor at Kiuna College, highlighted that the prevalence of psychosocial difficulties among Indigenous students “has multiple roots, but it is in large part connected to the identity and intergenerational traumas that have wounded

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97 Mzhiikenh Rodney Toulouse, *Brief on Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 17 April 2023.



multiple generations.”<sup>98</sup> Elder David Rattray identified two main issues that need to be addressed to achieve better outcomes:

[A]s [I]ndigenous people, we must break our code of silence, acknowledging the huge impact that intergenerational trauma has on many of our community members. Today we hurt each other way more than anybody else does, and this is something we don't even like to talk about, let alone address.

The second issue is that the school system doesn't know how to prepare [I]ndigenous youth to be emotionally ready to learn. They don't understand this intergenerational trauma and its impact.<sup>99</sup>

Sylvia Davis, Director of Education at Lac Seul First Nation, shared similar views, emphasizing the importance of dealing with trauma in children and their families, for better education outcomes: “[W]hen children and families experience trauma, survival is first and foremost and learning, unfortunately, becomes second.”<sup>100</sup> According to a 2019 report, First Nations children experienced rates of poverty between 32% and 53% in 2015 (depending on whether they have status and whether they live on reserve); Inuit and Métis children experienced lower rates of poverty (25% and 22% respectively) than First Nations children, but these rates were still much higher than that experienced by non-racialized, non-Indigenous children (12%).<sup>101</sup>

The committee received recommendations on the use of innovative methodologies and approaches, developed by Indigenous experts, such as the braiding of education with healing, and the use of trauma-informed approaches in education.<sup>102</sup> Others recommended increasing funding for awareness-raising on trauma<sup>103</sup> and the legacy and history of the *Indian Act* and residential schools,<sup>104</sup> and equipping school staff with the resources and tools to respond to students' needs.<sup>105</sup> Witnesses also emphasized the

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98 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (José-Tomás Arriola, Clinical Supervisor, Kiuna College).

99 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (David Rattray).

100 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis, Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation).

101 Natasha Beedie et al., “[Towards Justice: Tackling Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada](#),” *Upstream*, July 2019.

102 See for example: INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant, President, First Nations Technical Institute); INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis, Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation); and INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen, CASA National Indigenous Advocacy Committee).

103 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023, Sylvia Davis, Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation, North Western Ontario).

104 INAN, [Evidence](#), 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen, CASA National Indigenous Advocacy Committee).

105 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023, (Helen Bobiwash, accountant).



importance of support from Elders and cultural advisors, who may facilitate the “unburdening” of trauma in students.<sup>106</sup>

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends that:

#### **Recommendation 15**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to explore how to support Indigenous-led solutions in providing mental health, wellness and healing supports to Indigenous students and teachers who are dealing with trauma.**

#### **Recommendation 16**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, and provinces and territories to support the integration of culturally relevant, trauma-informed and Indigenous-led approaches in the education of Indigenous students, using teaching methods that apply a holistic approach to Indigenous education and pedagogies that focus on culture, knowledge and language.**

### **Education Infrastructure, Facilities and Internet Connectivity**

The committee heard about the need to improve elementary and secondary education infrastructure. Thomas Sierzycki identified infrastructure as another area of critical investment.<sup>107</sup> Melanie Bennett, Executive Director of the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, also said that she “would wholeheartedly support funding being put toward infrastructure especially, so that we could have a [F]irst [N]ations school in Yukon.”<sup>108</sup> According to Rebecca Mearns, Nunavut Arctic College has

enough funds to operate within what we’re doing, but there is more need when it comes to our student supports and to infrastructure funding. That’s really where we’re lacking at the moment, whether that be for physical buildings, housing and things like that, as well as Internet and accessibility.<sup>109</sup>

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106 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023, Melanie Bennett, (Executive Director, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate); INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023, Suzanne Brant, President, First Nations Technical Institute.

107 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Thomas Sierzycki).

108 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Melanie Bennett, Executive Director, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate).

109 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns).

According to Minister Hajdu, “[s]ince 2015, the federal government has committed \$2.35 billion in targeted funding for school facilities, and \$2.27 billion has been allocated, funding 250 projects, including 70 new schools.”<sup>110</sup> Despite these investments, the lack of or inadequate education infrastructure remains a concern for many witnesses who spoke before the committee, noting that a direct link exists between insufficient infrastructure and lower education outcomes. For instance, Nikki Osborne observed that school attendance is directly impacted by infrastructure upkeep, running water, heat and issues leading to school closures,<sup>111</sup> while Helen Bobiwash emphasized the importance of education capital for the implementation of self-governance agreements:

[E]ducation capital is important, particularly for schools, teacher wages, transportation vehicles, supporting infrastructure, operations and maintenance. Without the ability to invest in education capital, [F]irst [N]ations are unable to fully exercise their jurisdiction in education.<sup>112</sup>

For her part, Professor Catherine Cook observed that “the capital investment and infrastructure on federal reserve lands is almost non-existent for training and insufficient for the programming needs.”<sup>113</sup>

In its brief, the AFN wrote that “[s]tudents in poor school buildings have been found to score between 5 and 10 percentile points lower than students in functional buildings on academic tests after controlling for socioeconomic status.”<sup>114</sup> According to the AFN,

[t]he conditions of First Nations schools have been well documented with 202 First Nations schools being currently overcrowded, equal to half of the First Nations schools in Canada. In addition to overcrowded schools, there is a total of 56 that require immediate replacement based on reported poor conditions or facility age. Infrastructure conditions and shortages also force 54% of First Nations students to leave their community to achieve a high school diploma. As most students seek diplomas outside of their community, they are faced with systemic racism in provincial schools that are not equipped to provide any sort of cultural or language needs for First Nations learners... The AFN First Nations Education Infrastructure Research Collection estimates

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110 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).

111 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Nikki Osborne).

112 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (Helen Bobiwash, Accountant, Kinoomaadziwin Education Body).

113 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook).

114 Assembly of First Nations, *Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN) RE: Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, 27 March 2023.



that \$4.7 billion is required over the next five years for renovations, new construction and planning.<sup>115</sup>

Rory O'Connor, Director General of the Regional Infrastructure Delivery Branch at ISC, recognized that “there have been a number of new schools built thanks to the dedicated funding, but there is still a huge demand. Part of that is related to inflation, COVID cost increases and supplies. There is a demand. There is a list of schools waiting to be built.”<sup>116</sup> The committee was not provided with that list; in its 2022–2023 departmental results report, ISC indicated that 55% of First Nations schools (245 out of a total of 446 schools) had a condition rating of “good” or “new.” The department reports that, since 2016, 68 new schools have been built, and 145 existing schools have been renovated or upgraded.<sup>117</sup> According to the Assembly of First Nations, 202 First Nations schools are overcrowded and 56 require “immediate replacement.”<sup>118</sup>

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends that:

#### **Recommendation 17**

**That the Government of Canada develop a strategy, in cooperation with provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments, to identify how to address the crisis in education infrastructure that continues to affect the education of First Nations students, especially on reserve, and Indigenous students in northern communities.**

#### **Recommendation 18**

**That the Government of Canada work with all relevant governments to determine how to better address systemic racism in the education system and support culturally relevant education, including the shameful legacy of residential schools for students.**

### **Distance Learning and Virtual Student Supports**

Some witnesses highlighted how distance learning can help bridge some of the gaps in access to education and education outcomes. Thomas Sierzycki mentioned distance

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115 Ibid.

116 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Rory O'Connor, Director General, Regional Infrastructure Delivery Branch, Department of Indigenous Services).

117 Government of Canada, *Departmental Results Report 2022 to 2023*.

118 Assembly of First Nations, *Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (INAN) RE: Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, 27 March 2023.

learning opportunities as another area for critical investments; he also noted that Saskatchewan is in the process of establishing the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation (DLC):

In-school online facilitators will assist students with any learning challenges they may experience. It is important to note that the Sask DLC will provide opportunities to students where there may not be a teacher, or there's a teacher shortage within their classroom. This model will help students in remote areas with receiving the best possible education.<sup>119</sup>

However, he also emphasized the need to ensure that connectivity and infrastructure are in place, to enable such opportunities in remote communities. Other witnesses mentioned that the high cost of technical equipment and internet access was a barrier for many students in northern communities.<sup>120</sup> For instance, Kevin Lewis, Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Kâniyâsihk Culture Camps, said that, in his community, while technology for online schooling had been provided to households, online schooling itself could not be used during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a lack of connectivity.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, in Manitoba the creation of internet community hubs through a private partnership may provide an innovative solution for improving internet access in remote communities, in particular for post-secondary education.<sup>122</sup>

During this study, the committee received testimony from the Keewaytinook Internet High School, which offers services to 15 communities in northern Ontario, and which highlighted the importance of special student supports such as a graduation coach and student success counsellors. The committee also heard from charity Connected North, which operates in 150 schools and uses a “technology driven, classroom-based approach to connect First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and teachers living in remote communities across Canada to live virtual learning experiences and opportunities not available to them locally.” In its written brief, Connected North wrote:

To improve graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students, a focus must be on equitable access to learning resources and opportunities that are inspiring, culturally relevant, and customized to their unique learning goals. Harnessing the power of technology is also an essential component for creating accessible opportunities. Given the challenges of reaching students in some of Canada's most remote and isolated communities, many students lack the access to the educational resources,

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119 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Thomas Sierzycki).

120 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook).

121 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Kevin Lewis, Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Kâniyâsihk Culture Camps, As an individual).

122 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook).



mental wellness programming and future pathways guidance readily available to Kindergarten - Grade 12 students in the South.<sup>123</sup>

Michael Furdyk, Director of Innovation at Connected North, noted that funding “for virtual program delivery and virtual learning” is insufficient.<sup>124</sup> He later added that “what we need is more sustainable, longer-term funding, particularly around digital learning supports for students and schools... [W]e need recognition of the value of digital learning.”<sup>125</sup>

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends:

### **Recommendation 19**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, provinces and territories, as well as the private sector, to support internet connectivity and access in northern, remote and Indigenous communities to improve access to quality K-12 education.**

## **Self-Determination and Transformation of Indigenous Education**

Several witnesses advocated for promoting Indigenous self-determination in education to improve outcomes. Minister Hajdu told the committee that “[m]any [I]ndigenous partners are pursuing self-determined education. Nine regional education agreements have been signed to restore control to [F]irst [N]ations on the design and delivery of education on reserve... There are 50 agreements under development.”<sup>126</sup> According to Minister Hajdu, “self-determination is the key out of this mess.”<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the AFN noted that, “[s]ince the implementation of REAs [regional education agreements] and as First Nations gain greater control over their education systems, First Nations on-reserve

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123 Connected North, *Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 29 March 2023.

124 INAN, *Evidence*, 29 March 2023 (Michael Furdyk, Director of Innovation, Connected North).

125 Ibid.

126 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).

127 Ibid.

have seen progress in high school attainment. According to the 2021 Census, in the past five years, there has been a 10% increase in high school attainment on-reserve.”<sup>128</sup>

Other witnesses shared similar views. Leslee White-Eye with the First Nations with Schools Collective stated that “self-determination results in positive student outcomes that have larger positive impacts many times over.”<sup>129</sup> According to her:

The promise of [the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*] signalled Canada’s intention to deliver of this promise: to find and push down the barriers to our children’s freedom, according to article 14(1), to their right to a quality education, to their right to an education in their language and grounded in their culture, and to our responsibility as self-determining nations to provide it for them. A 2023 goal of the [First Nations with Schools Collective] therefore is to seek a legislated response for full and unfettered [F]irst [N]ations control over [F]irst [N]ations education, supported by a distinctions-based [F]irst [N]ation education funding parity plus model.<sup>130</sup>

Likewise, Professor Marie Battiste stated that:

What we’re aspiring for is self-determining, flourishing communities that have, want and are retaining all the foundations of their knowledge through their languages and through the kinds of learning processes that I talk about as holistic, lifelong, experiential and community activated.<sup>131</sup>

Helen Bobiwash, however, noted that “[e]ducation sectoral self-governing bodies also require additional investment to improve education outcomes. Sufficient governance funding is required to carry out additional responsibilities under self-governing education systems for both the participating [F]irst [N]ations and the coordinating body.”<sup>132</sup> In addition to the REAs, there are currently two sectoral self-government agreements in place. Dionne Savill, Director General, Implementation Branch, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs provided details on those agreements:

One is the [Mi’kmaw] agreement, the MK [Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey] agreement in Nova Scotia, where there are 12 [F]irst [N]ations. The other is the Anishinabe [F]irst [N]ation

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128 Assembly of First Nations, [Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs \(INAN\) RE: Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students](#), 27 March 2023.

129 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Leslee White-Eye).

130 Ibid.

131 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Marie Battiste).

132 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (Helen Bobiwash).



agreement, where there are 23 communities. Both of those sectoral self-government agreements allow for [F]irst [N]ations to decide how they want to deliver programming. In both situations, there is immersive programming from at least K to grade 3 or 4.<sup>133</sup>

Blaire Gould stated that, since its creation in the 1990s, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey has seen the graduation rates of its students increase from 20% to 90%: "The 90% is consistent and has been for about a decade, maybe more."<sup>134</sup> These graduation rates are significantly higher than the average for Indigenous students across the country; it is actually comparable to that of non-Indigenous students. The committee believes this shows the real, positive impacts of self-determination in education. These outcomes achieved by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey are also much higher than that achieved by Nunavut's public government, where the high school graduation rate was 47% in 2016–2017 (the last year for which data was available).<sup>135</sup> According to Blaire Gould,

We truly believe that the key to our success is that we work collectively to promote excellence in Mi'kmaq education. Our model supports communities as they exercise jurisdiction in education to educate the youth according to their values and customs. We offer guidance to our communities across many areas, such as academics, healthy living and language and culture, but their autonomy has allowed them to shape and deliver programming that would otherwise be missed if we mandated a one-size-fits-all model.

Even though our communities have jurisdiction over their own education, our leadership is committed to working together. The chiefs from each of our communities make collective decisions about important matters such as finances and capital infrastructure. They have made those hard decisions and sacrificed additions to their own communities for years to help other communities that may be in pursuit of exercising their jurisdiction within their own community so that they can have an opportunity to build. They support each other, knowing that what they do is for the betterment of the nation. It seems to work for us.<sup>136</sup>

For First Nations, the move toward self-determined education programs and services has been described as a "transformation." In its departmental plan, ISC explains that it is

working to transform elementary and secondary education programming for First Nations students to support education that respects First Nations' methods of teaching and learning. ....

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133 INAN, [Evidence](#), 6 March 2023 (Dionne Savill, Director General, Implementation Branch, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs).

134 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Blaire Gould).

135 Statistics Canada, [On-time high school graduation rates, 2016/2017 to 2019/2020](#).

136 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Blaire Gould).



As ISC concludes more regional education agreements and establishes a framework based on First Nations-led funding formulae, progress is being made towards increasing First Nations control over First Nations education. This upholds the UNDRIP call for Indigenous Peoples right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.<sup>137</sup>

As previously noted, nine REAs have been signed to date and 50 First Nations are currently working toward agreements.<sup>138</sup>

The committee is encouraged by the testimonies by multiple First Nations' witnesses which described in great detail their respective successes with First Nation-led education. The committee agrees that self-determination is key to improving education outcomes and graduation rates, not just among First Nations, but also for Inuit and Métis students. Based on the testimony, the committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 20**

**That Indigenous Services Canada respect the agreements it signs with Indigenous communities or the organizations representing them in education matters, particularly regarding the student-teacher ratio, and that the necessary funds to build the required infrastructure be provided to them.**

#### **Recommendation 21**

**That the Government of Canada continue to support the sharing of information, lessons learned and promising practices related to Indigenous self-determination in education among Indigenous communities.**

#### **Recommendation 22**

**That the Government of Canada develop a strategy on hiring local community members in management positions with a view to ensuring that Indigenous education is overseen by Indigenous people.**

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137 Government of Canada, *Indigenous Services Canada: 2023-24 Departmental Plan*.

138 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu); INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).



## Recommendation 23

**That the Government of Canada increase data collection to ensure that Indigenous peoples have access to the information they need to make evidence-based decisions to support education and develop programs that meet the real needs.**

## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

This section provides background on ISC's role in post-secondary education for Indigenous learners. It also summarizes witnesses' concerns relating to funding and other barriers to post-secondary education, and highlights successes and promising practices shared by witnesses through testimony and briefs.

ISC supports First Nations post-secondary education via the following programs:

- the Post-Secondary Student Support Program;<sup>139</sup>
- the University and College Entrance Preparation Program;<sup>140</sup> and

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139 Government of Canada, [Post-Secondary Student Support Program](#):

The program aims to improve the socio-economic outcomes for First Nations by supporting First Nations in providing eligible students with funding to access education opportunities at the post-secondary level. This is consistent with the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education.

To be eligible for funding, students must maintain a satisfactory academic standing within an eligible post-secondary institution. These include:

- educational institutions affiliated with, or those that deliver post-secondary programs by arrangement with a post-secondary institution
- First Nations-designated and directed institutions

Funding for this program is provided to First Nations or First Nations-designated organizations as part of core funding agreements with Indigenous governments and organizations.

- First Nations are responsible for determining the selection criteria and funding allocations in accordance with the provisions of their funding agreement and national program guidelines.

140 Government of Canada, [University and College Entrance Preparation Program](#):

This program provides non-repayable financial support for First Nations (registered Indian) students who are enrolled in accepted university and college entrance preparation programs.

The results of this program will enable First Nations students to achieve levels of post-secondary education comparable to non-Indigenous students in Canada.

Funding for this program is provided to First Nations or First Nations-designated organizations as part of core funding agreements with Indigenous governments and organizations.

- the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program, which supports First Nations—established post-secondary education institutions and First Nations community-based programming.<sup>141</sup>

Additionally, the department provides financial assistance to Inuit land claims organizations—through the Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy<sup>142</sup>—and to Métis Nation governments—through the Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy<sup>143</sup>—to help close the education attainment gap between Inuit and Métis students and non-Indigenous students.

In 2019, the Government of Canada committed to long-term funding (10 years) for distinctions-based post-secondary education strategies and programs aimed at transforming post-secondary education and developing regional post-secondary strategies.<sup>144</sup>

## Barriers

As Michael DeGagné, President and Chief Executive Officer of Indspire told the committee:

There is an urgency to [I]ndigenous post-secondary education. I can't say this enough. Our young population is not a future burden on society. Our young population represents an opportunity to make an outsized impact on Canadian society. We need to double down now. We are at the margins, but we are moving to the centre. In my

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141 Government of Canada, *Post-Secondary Partnerships Program*:

This program aims to increase the number of First Nations students pursuing post-secondary education and contribute to closing the education attainment gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous students in Canada.

The program is First Nations-directed, regionally delivered and supports First Nations-established post-secondary education institutions and First Nations community-based programming.

Funding allocations are determined by a 2-step process:

1. regional allocations are made based on First Nations population distribution;
2. First Nations designated and directed organizations in each region will work with ISC in the allocation of funds according to program guidelines.

142 Government of Canada, *Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy*.

143 Government of Canada, *Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy*.

144 Government of Canada, *Appearance before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students, March 6, 2023*.



view, that movement from the margins to the centre is what reconciliation is all about.<sup>145</sup>

A brief submitted by Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) describes how issues relating to closing the gap in attainment rates are intertwined:

Intersectional barriers facing Indigenous people to access post-secondary education persist. They include financial barriers, insufficient academic preparation, experience of racism and discrimination, difficulties with relocating to pursue studies, intergenerational trauma, and others.<sup>146</sup>

Renee St. Germain from the AFN told the committee that “attainment rates in post-secondary certificates, diplomas and degrees reveal an estimated 20% education gap between [F]irst [N]ations and non-[I]ndigenous Canadians.”<sup>147</sup> Professor Catherine Cook described that gap at the University of Manitoba:

Today 8.8% of the 30,000 students at U of M [the University of Manitoba] self-declare as [I]ndigenous. It is the largest [I]ndigenous student population in Canada, but the [I]ndigenous population of Manitoba is 18%, so it isn’t reflective. We must address this gap and work together to ensure that Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education and training receive the same quality of K-12 education and have the same sense of belonging.<sup>148</sup>

## Funding

The committee heard substantial testimony that funding for post-secondary education was a paramount concern. Witnesses told the committee that funding provided through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program is insufficient to cover all eligible students, and funding for institutions is insufficient to provide enough spaces for those who qualify. For example, Suzanne Brant, President, First Nations Technical Institute told the committee:

Every one of the programs we are currently running is oversubscribed. I’ll just give you an example. We opened our enrolment for our practical nurse program on March 9. Today I can tell you that we have 80 applicants, and we can only take 15 students.

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145 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 March 2023 (Michael DeGagné, President and Chief Executive Officer, Indspire).

146 Colleges and Institutes Canada, [The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students](#), Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

147 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).

148 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook).

There's more that needs to be done to support FNTI and [I]ndigenous institutes so we can continue to support our learners. We require resources to deliver our programs to meet the needs and demands coming from our communities. Without adequate funding, we cannot provide our students with appropriate infrastructure and fully culturally relevant curriculum and support. We cannot meet the increasing program, community and economic needs.<sup>149</sup>

The committee also heard that funding for institutions is insufficient to cover the needs of learners that are accepted into their programs, such as mental health services and housing.

Many witnesses emphasized that inadequate federal funding for post-secondary education infringed on treaty rights and inherent rights,<sup>150</sup> with Renee St. Germain specifying that “[t]here are over 30,000 [F]irst [N]ations post-secondary students year over year who are not funded in accordance with their treaty and inherent rights.”<sup>151</sup> Rebecca Mearns mentioned that while federal funding for Nunavut Arctic College was sufficient for operating the programs, more funding was needed for infrastructure, housing, mental health and food supports for students.<sup>152</sup>

As mentioned above, section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* assigns provinces with exclusive legislative authority over education. However, the Government of Canada provides funding to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis post-secondary students through a variety of programs. Minister Hajdu noted that in addition to funding through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, students are entitled to Canada student loans and grants.<sup>153</sup> A significant source of additional funding for individuals comes from Indspire. Michael DeGagné told the Committee that in 2023, Indspire would likely give more than 7,000 scholarships and bursaries worth more than \$26 million, commenting that Indspire is “an organization that has become a critical resource for [I]ndigenous students.”<sup>154</sup>

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149 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant).

150 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain); INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Denis Gros-Louis, Director General, First Nations Education Council, Kiuna College); INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen); Indigenous Institutes Consortium, *Investing in the Success of Indigenous Learners*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

151 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).

152 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns).

153 INAN, *Evidence*, 6 March 2023 (Hon. Patty Hajdu).

154 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Michael DeGagné).



Shannon Cornelsen, co-chair of the National Indigenous Advocacy Committee at the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, explained to the committee that 70% of new students who will qualify for post-secondary education in 2023 would not be able to enrol due to inadequate funding.<sup>155</sup>

Sylvia Davis, Director of Education for Lac Seul First Nation, shared with the committee that she had asked Minister Hajdu about including post-secondary funds in a REA, explaining that “if we as a community had the power to say that we needed this much money for educating our students who are from the community and who live outside the community, that would give us greater power.”<sup>156</sup>

In its brief, CIGan stated that “current funding needs more flexibility for supporting long-term training for those Indigenous students who require additional time and assistance to complete the program.”<sup>157</sup>

Based on the testimony, the committee recommends:

#### **Recommendation 24**

**That the Government of Canada work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and communities to address the inadequacy of federal funding for Indigenous post-secondary education.**

#### **Recommendation 25**

**That the Government of Canada work in collaboration with Indigenous organizations and communities to review Indigenous post-secondary funding models and to ensure that this funding is sufficient, flexible, needs-based, and long-term—and therefore predictable; that it work with them to identify ways to increase enrolment in programs offered near their communities; and that it provide for a program that gives them the ability to address exceptional requests so they can obtain the expertise they need in certain key areas to take responsibility for their community.**

The Post Secondary Partnership Program “provides funding to support First Nations to define their own partnerships with institutions to increase the availability of post-

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155 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen).

156 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis).

157 Colleges and Institutes Canada, *The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

secondary education programs tailored to First Nations cultural and educational needs.”<sup>158</sup> While the committee heard little about this particular program during its study, University nuxhelot’jine thaa?ehots’j nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (UnBQ) recommended in its brief that the federal government “[r]ecalculate the Post-Secondary Partnership Funding administered by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to ensure that all existing and emerging Indigenous owned and governed Post-Secondary Education Centres are appropriately funded for administration, operations, and programming.”<sup>159</sup>

In its brief, CIGan emphasized the importance of Indigenous post-secondary institutions:

Varying by size, the scope of programs and geographical coverage, Indigenous institutions offer education “grounded in Indigenous languages, pedagogies, cultures, and worldviews.” Seven CIGan members located in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario are designated Indigenous institutions, delivering culturally relevant programs as a means of preserving and strengthening Indigenous communities and their cultures and values.<sup>160</sup>

The committee heard from representatives of several post-secondary institutions who shared the challenges they face, including funding. For example, Mr. Gros-Louis from Kiuna College, explained to the committee that:

As a college institution, Kiuna receives funding based on a three-part formula from Quebec’s department of higher education, the Ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur du Québec. Unfortunately, the provincial formula only meets 40% of our operating budget requirements, and Kiuna’s dual educational and support services mission is therefore at risk. Kiuna College must be able to count on financial support from the federal government, because post-secondary education is not a social policy, it is our future.<sup>161</sup>

Suzanne Brant explained that “[i]f we had adequate operational [federal] funding, we could bring in any [I]ndigenous student without tuition.”<sup>162</sup> Ms. Rowles from Yukon University also spoke of the need for increased federal funding:

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158 Government of Canada, *Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: National Guidelines 2023 to 2024*.

159 University nuxhelot’jine thaa?etos’j nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills, *Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 31 March 2023.

160 Colleges and Institutes Canada, *The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

161 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Denis Gros-Louis).

162 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant).



There's a tremendous opportunity for the federal government to have a greater and more meaningful impact on small northern communities in the areas we've outlined. What's required is stable, longer-term funding models that enable us to collaborate with Yukon [F]irst [N]ations to develop, build, deliver and assess the programs we offer for the greatest success, and to scale up and expand when we achieve it.<sup>163</sup>

In its brief, CICan noted the challenges of program-based funding for institutions, advocating “for adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for all Indigenous post-secondary institutions across.”<sup>164</sup> The Indigenous Institutes Consortium echoed the need for “stable, long-term core operational funding,” noting that without it, “growth will be stalled along with the implementation of the TRC recommendations.”<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Kelsey Wrightson, Executive Director for the Dechinta Research and Learning Centre in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, told the committee that “[l]ong-term and predictable investments by Canada in community-directed [I]ndigenous education enables us to build relationships, create trust and create new programs.”<sup>166</sup>

The committee heard that reducing the gap in education attainment was constrained by both a lack of physical space to deliver programs and too few student places in programs. Rebecca Mearns, President of Nunavut Arctic College told the committee that delivering programs when limited physical space is available can impact other programs.<sup>167</sup>

Changes in the legal landscape that recognize Indigenous jurisdiction can lead to increased demand for some post-secondary programs, a demand which cannot be met without additional funding. For example, Suzanne Brant described the impact of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*:<sup>168</sup>

First [N]ations are working very hard to set up their own child well-being agencies, and we've been asked to provide the training.

We went ahead and developed a four-year degree program in a bachelor's of Indigenous social work. We obtained regulatory accreditation across Canada, and now

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163 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Shelagh Rowles).

164 Colleges and Institutes Canada, *The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

165 Indigenous Institutes Consortium, *Investing in the Success of Indigenous Learners*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

166 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Kelsey Wrightson).

167 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns).

168 *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, S.C. 2019, c. 24.



the program is accredited in Ontario. We're going to offer this program in January 2024.

This morning, there were 677 expressions of interest. We can only accept 36 students.<sup>169</sup>

## Colonialism and Racism, Lack of Academic and Wellness Supports, and Childcare

In addition to funding, witnesses referred to housing,<sup>170</sup> colonialism and racism,<sup>171</sup> a lack of academic and wellness supports,<sup>172</sup> and childcare<sup>173</sup> as barriers for Indigenous students seeking post-secondary education.

In its brief, CIGan expressed the opinion that requirements under the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and other federal program requirements, including “the requirement to maintain satisfactory academic standing with no room for failure and a limited list of programs and expenditures eligible for funding,” were barriers to access.<sup>174</sup>

Chief John Martin, Member of the Chiefs Committee, First Nations Education Council, told the committee that provincial legislation has an impact on post-secondary education in Quebec:

The Quebec charter gravely affects our efforts to revitalize our languages by demoting them to third-level language status.

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169 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant).

170 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen).

171 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook); Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, *Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 31 March 2023.

172 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Margaret Moss, Professor and Director, First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia); INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Shannon Cornelsen).

173 Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, *Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 31 March 2023.

174 Colleges and Institutes Canada, *The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.



It creates administrative hurdles for our students to access post-secondary education in Quebec and to receive an education in the language of their choice.<sup>175</sup>

Sylvia Davis shared some of the challenges of being an Indigenous person in a post-secondary setting with the committee:

One of the biggest barriers that our students face is racism. As [I]ndigenous people, we have faced systemic discrimination and marginalization for centuries, and this has a significant impact on our students' education and overall well-being. Systemic systems like racism cannot be fixed or solved by [I]ndigenous peoples alone.<sup>176</sup>

The committee heard from post-secondary education experts about their ongoing efforts to decolonize education. For instance, Professor Shelagh Rowles mentioned the importance of considering the needs of Indigenous Nations and students in education and Professor Marie Battiste referred to the need to “bring ... ways of learning and doing together” rather than having Indigenous issues as “a separate content area.”<sup>177</sup>

When she appeared, Sylvia Davis challenged the committee

to be mindful that some of the issues creating barriers that prohibit [I]ndigenous students from realizing higher levels of academic success could be rooted in an inherent racist perspective by some educators. ... This could be manifested in a culture of low expectations for academic rigour and achievement.<sup>178</sup>

In its brief, the Indigenous Institutes Consortium emphasized the importance of Indigenous post-secondary education institutions in providing “equitable, culturally relevant post-secondary education” to Indigenous students:

Non-Indigenous colleges and universities are not safe or well-positioned to meet the unique needs of Indigenous learners. While there have been improvements, Indigenous learners experience lack of knowledge of Indigenous history and culture, racism, marginalization, isolation.<sup>179</sup>

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175 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (John Martin, Members of the Chiefs Committee, First Nations Education Council).

176 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis).

177 INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Shelagh Rowles); INAN, *Evidence*, 27 March 2023 (Marie Battiste).

178 INAN, *Evidence*, 17 April 2023 (Sylvia Davis).

179 Indigenous Institutes Consortium, *Investing in the Success of Indigenous Learners*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 13 April 2023.

## Promising Practices

While many barriers to closing the post-secondary education gap were discussed by witnesses, witnesses also shared many inspiring success stories and promising practices. The committee heard, for example, from Kiuna College, a post-secondary institution in Quebec. Kiuna considers itself “a place where First Nations cultures are reclaimed and revitalized and where students are exposed to First Nations perspectives and visions of the world, as well as the many cultural contributions First Nations have made to global society.”<sup>180</sup>

In January 2019, the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) undertook a series of major initiatives to support Indigenous peoples. These institutional commitments led to a number of concrete achievements, demonstrating UQAT’s genuine desire to partner with and respect Indigenous communities. The achievements included building the First Peoples Pavilion, a space dedicated to Indigenous culture and history. The First Peoples Service was also implemented to provide support tailored to Indigenous students. Seminars on the ethics of research involving Indigenous peoples were held, showing a desire to take a respectful and ethical approach to studies and research. The School of Indigenous Studies was established to provide teaching that is specific to these cultures and realities. Furthermore, establishing the position of Strategic Advisor for Reconciliation and Indigenous Education showed UQAT’s strong commitment to reconciliation. The Mamawi Mikimodan (Acting Together) Service was also launched, promoting dialogue and collaboration between Indigenous communities and UQAT. The creation of the position of Vice-Rector, Reconciliation, Partnerships and International Development marked a major turning point in how UQAT approaches its relationship with Indigenous peoples. Lastly, the Indigenization of the Bachelor of Preschool and Elementary Education program highlights the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the education system. These initiatives demonstrate UQAT’s ongoing and concrete commitment to recognizing, respecting and valuing Indigenous peoples.

The recent initiative to establish a university teaching model adapted to Indigenous peoples at Laval University shows the growing importance given to diversity and inclusion. The Knowledge House, created through a collaboration between the First Nations Education Council and Laval University, promises to be innovative and respectful of Indigenous cultures, opening new paths for education and reconciliation.

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180 Kiuna College, *Mission*.



Rebecca Mearns explained that through recent funding, the number of communities that offered a Bachelor of Education program doubled:

This has been ... an important investment in the college and for Nunavut, providing decentralized training for Inuit and other Nunavummiut and providing the necessary credentials for those individuals to become teachers within our elementary schools.

The [Nunavut Teacher Education] program now embeds Inuit language and culture courses into the first two years of this five-year program. In doing this, students now have an exit option after two years, having earned an Inuktitut language and cultural diploma. Exit and entry points are an important feature for adult learners. The college is proud of the work it has done to create these laddering opportunities.

The pathfinder funding included academic and non-academic supports to encourage student success. Key supports identified by the college included academic tutors, Inuit cultural advisers and elders, and information technology.

...

I can't overstate the magnitude of this investment. Over the past two years, the college has gone from delivering the Nunavut teacher education program in eight Nunavut communities, with approximately 90 students, to our current delivery in 15 communities, with over 170 students enrolled. For a small institution with just over 270 staff and faculty positions, this is an incredible increase.<sup>181</sup>

The committee also heard about Yukon University's achievements from Professor Shelagh Rowles, who noted that they have 13 campuses on the traditional territories of the 14 Yukon First Nations in 12 communities.<sup>182</sup> She also explained that "to ensure understanding and appreciation for the unique context we operate in throughout the Yukon," all graduates and employees were required to complete a Yukon First Nations [Core] competency.<sup>183</sup>

One of Yukon University's programs is the housing maintainer program:

During the past two years, the university has worked with three [First Nations] governments to deliver the program to 29 students. Students developed knowledge in the skilled trades and acquired an understanding of modern building science. They were

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181 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Rebecca Mearns).

182 INAN, [Evidence](#), 27 March 2023 (Shelagh Rowles).

183 Ibid.

able to use the course hours towards an apprenticeship if they decided to pursue those paths—plus, they increased housing capacity in their home communities.<sup>184</sup>

Professor Shelagh Rowles explained that Yukon University also has an arts certificate program and environmental monitoring certificate program, and that all graduates from that program were employed. She highlighted the importance of the skills gained in the environmental monitoring certificate program:<sup>185</sup>

[P]roviding the knowledge and skills for just one individual can make an incredible impact on a community of three hundred or four hundred people. It can mean that water quality is monitored and that repairs to the community gathering space or housing can be done without waiting weeks for someone from afar to come.<sup>186</sup>

Suzanne Brant explained that the FNTI provides “post-secondary programming in the areas of social science, health sciences, governance and policy, humanities, research and innovation, and aviation technology.”<sup>187</sup> The FNTI takes a holistic approach to education:

We recognize that a lot of our students have experienced many traumas. We want to make sure that they have the opportunity to unburden those traumas while they’re in our programs. We provide student success facilitators and cultural advisers in all of our programming. They’re there to help support the students. This helps to build pride and confidence within our students as well. This has [led] to a graduation rate of over 92% in the last three years.<sup>188</sup>

While the University of Manitoba [U of M] is not an Indigenous post-secondary education institution, Catherine Cook, Vice-President, Indigenous, told the committee that “[t]oday 8.8% of the 30,000 students at U of M self-declare as [I]ndigenous. It is the largest [I]ndigenous student population in Canada, but the [I]ndigenous population of Manitoba is 18%, so it isn’t reflective.”<sup>189</sup> Catherine Cook also told the committee that the University of Manitoba had entered into a partnership with the Mastercard Foundation’s EleV program, which provides financial support “to explore new opportunities that were codesigned by [F]irst [N]ations, Métis and Inuit partners.”<sup>190</sup>

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184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 INAN, *Evidence*, 22 March 2023 (Suzanne Brant).

188 Ibid.

189 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 March 2023 (Catherine Cook).

190 Ibid.



The University’s partnership with EleV has enabled the development of a learning hub in Pinaymootang First Nation, which provides “Internet, technology and wraparound supports. It allows students attending any Manitoba post-secondary institution to access online classes and programs with the goal of developing the in-person, in-community delivery of training that’s identified as a priority by the community.”<sup>191</sup> Other hubs are to be established throughout Manitoba:

The learning hubs address some of the previously mentioned systemic challenges, and they also keep young people near language speakers, culture and support systems. They provide opportunities for inspiring and mentoring students still in K-12, and they increase the chances of graduates staying in the community to work, which will contribute to building capacity and community.<sup>192</sup>

Kelsey Wrightson described the Dechinta Research and Learning Centre’s programming to the committee:

Dechinta’s family-inclusive programming was codesigned by [I]ndigenous faculty and elders to create education models that celebrate the knowledge of [I]ndigenous communities and help mitigate barriers that folks are facing when accessing post-secondary [education].

...

University-level accredited programming at Dechinta lasts between one to six weeks and is open to people of all ages. For some students, it’s the start of their education journey. For others, it renews their commitment to learning. In the past year we’ve had over 200 applicants to our program: 40% of those applicants needed [I]ndigenous approaches to health and wellness, and 20% requested child care to support their success.<sup>193</sup>

Margaret Moss, Professor and Director, First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia, discussed the importance of Indigenous staff members in post-secondary educational institutions “to ensure that there are opportunities for belonging throughout the campus.”<sup>194</sup> She told the committee:

There’s a great diversity of [I]ndigenous students at UBC, each with their own unique needs. We need to ensure that there are many different spaces and resources for students to connect. The UBC Longhouse and the *šxʷta:təχʷəm* Collegium provide spaces where staff and student staff are invested in creating belonging by reaching out

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191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Kelsey Wrightson).

194 INAN, [Evidence](#), 22 March 2023 (Margaret Moss).

and supporting students. Additional campus spaces and support for [I]ndigenous students ensure that there's flexibility, so students also have the ability to change spaces and supports as needed.<sup>195</sup>

Cassidy Caron, President of the MNC described two Métis-specific post-secondary institutions: "in Saskatchewan we have the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is Métis-run. They develop and deliver Métis-specific learning tools and ... different programs and services. In the province of Alberta, we have the Rupertsland Institute as well."<sup>196</sup>

Natan Obed, President of ITK, described the path toward an Inuit Nunangat university:

Across Inuit Nunangat and wherever Inuit live, there are arrangements between Inuit organizations or jurisdictions and southern jurisdictions for particular programs, such as a law program, a bachelor of education or a master's in education. They are one-offs, and usually there are service agreements or arrangements between jurisdictions and southern institutions. We are hoping to break free of that model as the only model. We are in the process of creating an Inuit Nunangat university. Our board has mandated us to pursue the development of that university. That was in 2017. We hope that by the end of this year we will have a full-scale model proposed to our board for us to then go into that next phase of creating the institution.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, in a brief to the committee, NorQuest College, which is Alberta's largest community college and located in downtown Edmonton, explains that "in 2019, an Indigenous Imperative Roadmap was created to advance and elevate the distinct and unique needs of Indigenous people."<sup>198</sup> NorQuest College has focused on equity in admissions, improved course completion, and "elevating Indigenous knowledge systems within curriculum and pedagogy."<sup>199</sup>

With respect to admissions, NorQuest explains in its brief that it has sought to make the admissions process more equitable by:

introducing admissions floors which reserve a set number of seats in high-demand programs for Indigenous learners; removing the application fee for current and prospective Indigenous learners applying to NorQuest programs, introducing Open Admissions Pathways for learners who do not meet admissions requirements, and

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195 Ibid.

196 INAN, *Evidence*, 15 February 2023 (Cassidy Caron).

197 INAN, *Evidence*, 15 February 2023 (Natan Obed).

198 NorQuest College, *Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*, 30 March 2023.

199 Ibid.



working with Indspire and private donors to increase the availability of financial assistance for Indigenous learners at NorQuest College.

These changes have already had significant impacts at NorQuest College. During the 2016–17 academic year, 55% of Indigenous applicants were successfully enrolled in a NorQuest program. By 2020–21, that number grew to 73%. This demonstrates how important it is for post-secondary institutions across Canada to evaluate their admissions process and actively work to remove systemic barriers which prevent Indigenous learners from entering the post-secondary system.

With respect to completion rates, NorQuest has

actively sought to understand the factors which influence course completion rates among Indigenous learners. This includes shifting the focus away from Indigenous learners to our internal policies, processes, and procedures to ensure we can make systemic changes to support and advance the needs of the learners themselves. This learner-[centred] approach recognizes the overlapping systemic and structural barriers that Indigenous learners experience. In doing so, attention is pivoted away from superficial inclusion efforts to substantive changes that work to include rather than exclude. In doing so, we hope to increase the likelihood of success for Indigenous learners.

In addition, NorQuest College has established an Indigenous House of Learning, which is

focused on ensuring that Indigenous knowledge is recognized as legitimate, valued, and foundational. This includes work to understand our faculty environments and determining how we can ensure that Indigenous knowledge systems are elevated within our curriculum and pedagogy across the organization.<sup>200</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Given the long-lasting consequences of the residential and day “schools,” there is an imperative for Canada to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in the area of education. Education is an investment in the future. However, we cannot gloss over the past, especially given the fact that the last residential school was closed in the 1990s. These events are relatively recent and were ongoing for most of Canada’s history as an independent country.

Indigenous children and youth represent one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population. Closing the educational attainment gaps is not just the right thing to do; it is in the country’s interest to do so. Citing a study by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, Indspire wrote that “\$27.7 billion could be added to the

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200    Ibid.



economy and national GDP boosted by up to 1.5% annually if the labour market and education gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians were closed.” Renee St Germain agreed about the impact on the GDP and explained that investing in closing the education gap would add “an additional 188,000 jobs for [F]irst [N]ations people.”<sup>201</sup>

Former teacher and administrator Lois Philipp told the committee that “it’s about working together for a common vision and setting aside our differences to understand that we want success as [I]ndigenous peoples, but it’s not always something that is achievable within the present systems.”<sup>202</sup>

In conclusion, while the committee has learned that there are encouraging initiatives underway to improve education outcomes for First Nations for K-12 through self-governance agreements, more still needs to be done to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit children across the continuum of education. The committee agrees with witnesses that to improve graduation results significantly, more comprehensive efforts across departments and across levels of government—while ensuring that their respective areas of jurisdiction are respected—and increased investments in Indigenous education, are urgently needed. Investments in Indigenous education are investments in Canada’s future. The objective is to achieve education by and for Indigenous peoples.

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201 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 March 2023 (Renee St. Germain).

202 INAN, [Evidence](#), 29 March 2023 (Lois Philipp, Former Teacher and Administrator, As an individual).



## APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

| Organizations and Individuals   | Date       | Meeting |
|---|------------|---------|
| <b>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami</b><br>Natan Obed, President<br>Jenny Tierney, Director of Policy Advancement  | 2023/02/15 | 52      |
| <b>Métis National Council</b><br>Cassidy Caron, President   | 2023/02/15 | 52      |
| <b>Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs</b><br>Angela Bate, Director General<br>Dionne Savill, Director General, Implementation Branch   | 2023/03/06 | 53      |
| <b>Department of Indigenous Services</b><br>Jonathan Allen, Director<br>Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous Services<br>Rory O'Connor, Director General, Regional Infrastructure Delivery Branch, Regional Operations Sector<br>Gina Wilson, Deputy Minister | 2023/03/06 | 53      |
| <b>Assembly of First Nations</b><br>Renee St. Germain, Director of Languages and Learning   | 2023/03/08 | 54      |
| <b>Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning</b><br>Kelsey Wrightson, Executive Director  | 2023/03/08 | 54      |
| <b>First Nations Education Council</b><br>Annie Gros-Louis, Educational Services Director<br>John Martin, Member of the Chiefs Committee  | 2023/03/08 | 54      |

| <b>Organizations and Individuals</b>  | <b>Date</b> | <b>Meeting</b> |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| <b>First Nations with Schools Collective</b><br>Leslee White-Eye, Governance Director   | 2023/03/08  | 54             |
| <b>Headwater Learning Solutions</b><br>Dana Braunberger,<br>Research and Innovation<br>Irene Oakes, Project Specialist                  | 2023/03/08  | 54             |
| <b>Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey</b><br>Blaire Gould, Executive Director  | 2023/03/08  | 54             |
| <b>University of Manitoba</b><br>Catherine Cook, Vice-President,<br>Indigenous  | 2023/03/08  | 54             |
| <b>First Nations Technical Institute</b><br>Suzanne Brant, President  | 2023/03/22  | 55             |
| <b>Indspire</b><br>Michael DeGagné, President and Chief Executive Officer   | 2023/03/22  | 55             |
| <b>Saskatchewan Ministry of Education</b><br>Thomas Sierzycki, Northern Education Advisor   | 2023/03/22  | 55             |
| <b>University of British Columbia</b><br>Margaret Moss, Professor and Director,<br>First Nations House of Learning                      | 2023/03/22  | 55             |
| <b>Yukon First Nation Education Directorate</b><br>Melanie Bennett, Executive Director  | 2023/03/22  | 55             |
| <b>As an individual</b><br>Kevin Lewis, Assistant Professor,<br>University of Saskatchewan, Kâniyâsihk Culture Camps                    | 2023/03/27  | 56             |
| <b>Cape Breton University</b><br>Marie Battiste, Special Advisor to the Vice President<br>Academic, Provost on Decolonizing the Academy | 2023/03/27  | 56             |
| <b>Keewatinook Internet High School</b><br>Nikki Osborne, Teacher and Graduation Coach  | 2023/03/27  | 56             |
| <b>Nunavut Arctic College</b><br>Rebecca Mearns, President  | 2023/03/27  | 56             |

| <b>Organizations and Individuals</b>  | <b>Date</b> | <b>Meeting</b> |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| <b>Université du Québec à Montréal</b><br>Marco Bacon, Director,<br>Office of Inclusion and Student Success                               | 2023/03/27  | 56             |
| <b>Yukon University</b><br>Shelagh Rowles, Provost and Vice-President Academic  | 2023/03/27  | 56             |
| <b>As an individual</b><br>Lois Philipp, Former Teacher and Administrator<br>David Rattray, Retired Teacher                               | 2023/03/29  | 57             |
| <b>Connected North</b><br>Michael Furdyk, Director of Innovation<br>Karen R. Restoule, Advisory Board Member                              | 2023/03/29  | 57             |
| <b>Kinoomaadziwin Education Body</b><br>Helen Bobiwash, Accountant  | 2023/03/29  | 57             |
| <b>Native Women's Association of Canada</b><br>Lisa J. Smith, Interim Adviser to the President  | 2023/03/29  | 57             |
| <b>As an individual</b><br>Ella Estey, Student  | 2023/04/17  | 58             |
| <b>Canadian Alliance of Student Associations</b><br>Shannon Cornelsen, Co-Chair,<br>National Indigenous Advocacy Committee                | 2023/04/17  | 58             |
| <b>Congress of Aboriginal Peoples</b><br>Elmer St. Pierre   | 2023/04/17  | 58             |
| <b>Kiuna College</b><br>José-Tomás Arriola, Clinical Supervisor<br>Denis Gros-Louis, Director General,<br>First Nations Education Council | 2023/04/17  | 58             |
| <b>Lac Seul First Nation</b><br>Sylvia Davis, Director of Education   | 2023/04/17  | 58             |
| <b>Tlicho Government</b><br>Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, Director,<br>Department of Culture and Lands Protection                        | 2023/04/17  | 58             |



## **APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS**

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The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

**Assembly of First Nations**

**Battiste, Marie**

**Canadian Alliance of Student Associations**

**Chiefs of Ontario**

**Colleges and Institutes Canada**

**Connected North**

**Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning**

**Headwater Learning Solutions**

**Indigenous Institutes Consortium**

**Indspire**

**NorQuest College**

**Rattray, David**

**Toulouse, Mzhiikenh**

**University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills**

**Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue**





## REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 52-58, 60, 94-96, 101 and 102](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

John Aldag  
Chair



## SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION ISSUED BY THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

### **Improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students – let's further value a model by and for Indigenous communities**

"Kiuna's testimony was decisive in the culturally adapted approach that must be prioritized. This speaks to the crucial importance of placing Indigenous culture at the heart of education to ensure the success and fulfillment of youth, thereby ensuring their success and identity pride. The Bloc Québécois fully subscribes to this, recognizing the crucial importance of this approach for the future of Indigenous communities in Quebec and the importance of ensuring its sustainability. Additionally, we are proud of the collaboration between Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Dawson College in promoting this educational commitment." - **Sébastien Lemire, Bloc Québécois MP.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Bloc Québécois commends the Committee members as well as the Parliamentary Library staff for their work during this study. The same gratitude goes to all witnesses, citizens, and organizations engaged in the study, as well as the experts who enriched public debate on the subject by submitting their observations in the form of letters and briefs. There is no doubt that these contents will be relevant to revisit in the near future. Canadian governance in post-secondary education raises significant issues that have significant impacts on Indigenous communities. We provide an overview of certain elements that deserved more attention.

### **KIUNA: An Indigenous education model for the future of First Nations in Quebec**

Founded in 2011, the post-secondary institution Kiuna is on its way to shaping the Indigenous leaders of tomorrow. Kiuna offers an educational and cultural alternative to traditional schooling while adhering to ministry standards. In the late 1970s, the federal government funded a similar center called Manitou College, which is now located at the site of the federal penitentiary in La Macaza in the Laurentians. Many argue that the federal government did not want an Indigenous activism center in Quebec. In Western Canada, Indigenous post-secondary institutions emerged shortly after Manitou and have never closed.

Today, calls to action guide actions that ground youth in their culture and language.

The Bloc Québécois demands predictable investment based on the actual needs of Indigenous learners, as this appears to us as a measure the federal government should support as a trustee and partly responsible for the success and perseverance of Indigenous students in Quebec.

The federal government should fund and better support the First Nations College Studies Center, Kiuna Institution.

Kiuna celebrates differences rather than bypassing them, and young learners gain a stronger pride in their identity through their experience in this Indigenous-led institution. Its entire curriculum is rooted in Indigenous culture. The literature taught is Indigenous, philosophy courses are replaced with classes engaging in reflections on territory, resources, environment, and the role of traditional knowledge in the contemporary world.

Kiuna has recently opened branches in Wemotaci in Mauricie and at Alma, in the Mamik Center, in Lac-Saint-Jean, to better serve Quebec's Indigenous population, which has a great need for education – if only because it is younger than the rest of the population.

The experience is confirmed – and the need has been expressed elsewhere in Quebec's territory. Better tailored needs for the Northern Quebec communities have been expressed by the Inuit communities in Nunavik and within Cree communities.

While most of the Indigenous youth aspires to obtain post-secondary education, less than 20% of the population will achieve a college diploma.

A study by Emmanuelle Dufour, a doctoral student in anthropology, identifies several anticipated obstacles for Indigenous learners:

- **Fear of failure:** 55%
- **Community distance:** 38%
- **Lack of money:** 37%
- **Lack of interest:** 23%
- City cultural shock: 18%
- Lack of family or community support: 18%
- Teachers unfamiliar with Indigenous cultures: 15%
- Learning methods used in school: 15%
- Racism or discrimination: 14%
- Language of instruction: 12%
- Incompatible lifestyle with studies: 8%

More solutions need to be explored to eliminate obstacles and enable indigenous youth success. Two formulas coexist in Quebec:

- Adapted reception of Indigenous learners in existing post-secondary institutions - funded by the Government of Quebec.
- Adapted post-secondary programs and services offered by an affiliated institution "by and for Indigenous peoples" - initially funded by the Government of Canada, which later completely disengaged.

Students attending Kiuna exhibit a confidence level twice as high as those attending other post-secondary institutions.

If one thing were to be retained, it's the real impact of Kiuna Institution on which all Indigenous communities can rely.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

We therefore add to the list of recommendations in this report on education within Indigenous communities:

- That the federal government funds post-secondary education for Indigenous peoples by prioritizing the creation of culturally adapted spaces, as this model promotes retention and post-secondary success for First Nations students in Quebec.
- That the federal government supports the deployment of satellite classes in Northern Quebec to reduce the distance of young people from their community and the deployment of adapted programs that meet the needs identified by Indigenous communities.

### **MAISON DES SAVOIRS “HOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE” – An innovative project**

In the months following the INAN Committee sessions on education, a partnership between Laval University and the First Nations Education Council (CEPN) was established to create a House of Knowledge adapted to Indigenous peoples, marking a crucial turning point towards university education respectful of Indigenous values, traditions, and languages. This project, driven by a bold vision, draws inspiration from the millennia-old history of First Nations to offer authentic and relevant education.

The Maison des Savoirs “House of Knowledge”, although still in its embryonic stage, represents a significant step towards Indigenous educational self-determination, with a majority Indigenous governance and a clear objective of increasing graduation rates at the graduate level. Laval University, as a facilitating partner, will provide its expertise to materialize this innovative project. This partnership reflects the desire to train a new generation of Indigenous teachers and professionals, thereby contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of Indigenous communities.

Despite persistent challenges such as cultural and geographical uprooting to access higher education, this partnership opens promising prospects. The goal of doubling the number of Indigenous students at Laval University testifies to the commitment to inclusive and empowering education.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- That the federal government provides funding and subscribes to investment in a model supporting the creation and development of educational programs tailored to the specific needs of First Nations, thereby promoting academic success and well-being for Indigenous students. Additionally, adequate funding will ensure the establishment of a predominantly Indigenous governance within the Maison des Savoirs “House of Knowledge”, ensuring responsible ownership and management of education by Indigenous communities themselves.

### **UQAT, A REFERENCE IN INDIGENOUS STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

Since its founding in 1983, the “Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscaminque” (UQAT) has collaborated extensively with First Nations and Inuit and has fully assumed its role as an agent of change. It participates in reconciliation among all peoples in a concrete way and contributes to the development of skills and well-being of Indigenous communities.

Through its governance, its desire for representativeness, and its partnership with Indigenous communities, UQAT ensures that First Nations and Inuit can play a decisive role in university management, for example, through the board of directors, the research ethics committee with human beings, as well as the advisory committee of First Peoples. This partnership and active contribution of UQAT to the development of training and research for, by, and with Indigenous peoples make it an indispensable actor in Quebec.

In addition to developing study programs that respect Indigenous perspectives, UQAT promotes culturally relevant teaching methods and access to success support services by placing the student at the heart of its mission. It supports the improvement of intercommunity relations through research that provides, among other things, a unique perspective on education, the environment, and social development.

With its unique approach, UQAT maintains its commitment to remain a reference in Indigenous matters in Quebec and Canada:

- Nearly 1,000 diplomas awarded to Indigenous people
- More than 3,000 people trained in Indigenous realities in nearly sixty companies and organizations.
- Student services offered according to a holistic approach, focusing on the individual and their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs.
- Multiple platforms for university development such as the School of Indigenous Studies and the Research, Training, and Development Unit in Inuit and Indigenous environments
- A university recognized for its numerous research projects for, by, and with First Nations, Inuit and Metis people.
- A university recognized for its research intensity per professor
- The inclusion of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in university governance bodies.
- Collaborations and partnerships with several Indigenous organizations and communities

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- That the federal government recognizes all the knowledge possessed by universities that have developed study programs respectful of Indigenous perspectives and that future projects identified by Indigenous communities with which they collaborate be prioritized and receive adequate funding.