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INAN Report

IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FOR FIRST NATION STUDENTS

The Chiefs of Ontario (COO) is pleased to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to inform the study they are undertaking on improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for First Nation students. The purpose of the COO as an organization is to enable the First Nation Leadership to discuss and to decide on regional, provincial and national priorities affecting First Nation people in Ontario and to provide a unified voice on these matters. The COO supports all First Nations in Ontario as they assert their sovereignty, jurisdiction, and their chosen expression of nationhood.

The Education Sector at the COO Secretariat is mandated by First Nation Leadership in Ontario to advocate for First Nations control over First Nations languages and learning as determined by First Nations. The COO aims to empower and support First Nations as they build capacity by providing political support, technical expertise, research, and strategies. A key goal of the Education Sector at the COO is to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with internal/external parties to evaluate/analyze policies that close gaps in First Nations education and meets the lifelong learning needs of First Nations peoples.

The COO fosters unity among the 133 First Nation communities in Ontario by ensuring all communities are represented in committees established to undertake specific mandates as directed by the Chiefs-in-Assembly. The COO Education Sector works with very closely with the Chiefs and Technical Committee on Languages and Learning (CTCLL), which consists of representation from the four provincial territorial organizations (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Association of Iroquois and Allied

Indians, Grand Council Treaty #3 and the Anishinabek Nation) the Independent First Nations, the Mushkegowuk Council and the unaffiliated First Nation communities.

The CTCLL establishes advisory groups to focus on specific mandates as required. The Ontario Technical Table on the Interim Funding Approach (OTTIFA) is a joint technical group established by the CTCLL to work bilaterally with Indigenous Services Canada to examine and refine the way First Nations education is funded. The OTTIFA also works to identify and address gaps and underfunded areas that hinder performance of First Nation students and schools. Efforts related to this mandate include the establishment of a special task team under the OTTIFA to determine areas of redress and find solutions to close these systemic gaps. The Systemic Gaps Task Team is responsible for developing recommendations to First Nations Leadership and Indigenous Services Canada that will improve policies, programs, and services that currently contribute to less favourable outcomes for First Nation learners than for the majority of the population.

Barriers to student success and gaps in student success for First Nations learners are outlined in a plethora of reports and studies including a 2016 report written by Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse “What Matters in Indigenous Education: Implementing a Vision Committed to Holism, Diversity and Engagement. In Measuring What Matters, People for Education.” In this report Dr. Pam indicates only 39% of First Nations peoples living on-reserve graduate from high school and that there is a 20% gap on Grade 3 EQAO reading results (provincial standard achievement) between Indigenous students (47%) and the general population (67%). 2016 Census data for Ontario indicates high school non-completion rates are around 19% for off-reserve First Nations women, compared with 38% on reserve and 25% high school non-completion for men off-reserve compared to 43% on reserve.

Dr. Pam cites myriad issues that confront First Nation students in varying degrees, including but not limited to colonialism, racism, social exclusion, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, limited access

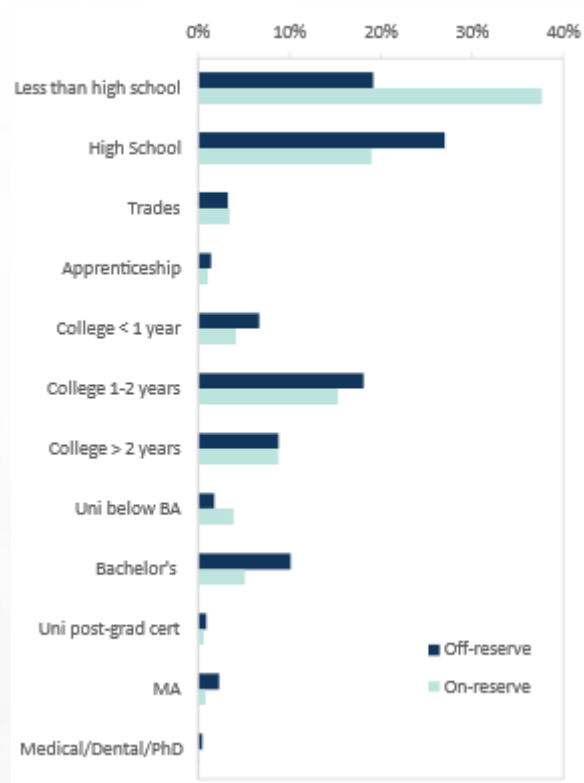
to housing and poor health. At the Chiefs of Ontario we witness on a daily basis how First Nations and the provincial education system lack capacity and are not supported with the tools and resources to address the policies, programs, people and politics that could alleviate some of these issues.

Other reports also identify and confirm gaps that hinder First Nation student success such as the Call to Action #10 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report which calls for improving education attainment levels and success rates; the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read inquiry report; the Nishnawbe Aski Nation 2020 Achievement Gap Analysis 2020 and the Seven Youth Inquest Recommendations.

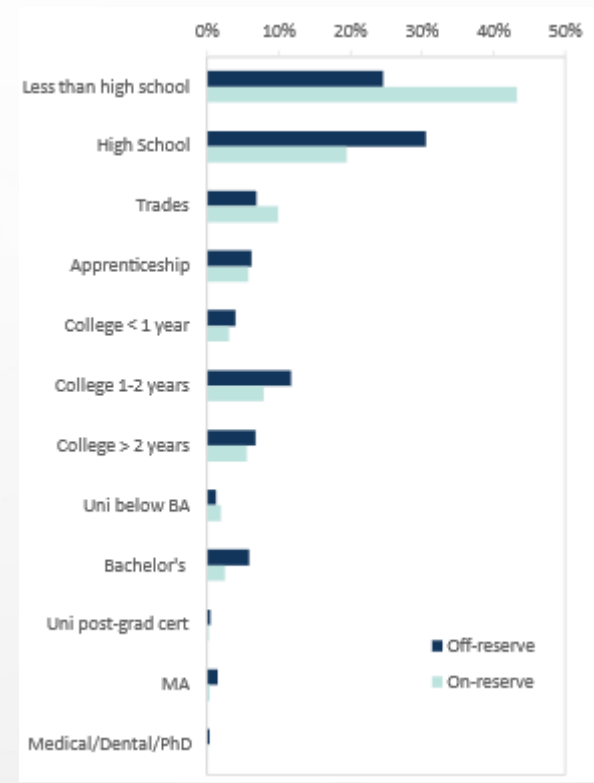
A recent study “Economic returns to First Nations post-secondary education in Ontario: A report for the Chiefs of Ontario” finds growth in the educational attainment of First Nations people in Ontario, but not enough to catch up with that of non-Indigenous people. The key gaps are in high school completion and attainment of bachelor's degrees. Data shows around 33% of First Nations people have less than high school compared with 17% in the non-Indigenous population. The following charts illustrate some of these findings.

Educational attainment of First Nations people in Ontario, on and off reserve

Women



Men



Initial engagement undertaken by the Systemic Gaps Task Team finds there are longstanding and systemic inequities in the funding and administration of First Nations education, in the context of both federally-funded First Nations schools and the educational experiences of First Nations children in the provincially funded system. Systemic gaps in education create and maintain systemic discrimination, which creates barriers to educational attainment and achievement for First Nation learners. It is also important to understand that these systemic gaps have been exacerbated by interruptions to education over the last three years due to the in COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially evident in increased incidents of student disengagement.

Initial engagement has also resulted in the following list of known and suspected systemic gaps:

- Professional Development opportunities for teachers and parents/caregivers
- Libraries (physical and on-line)
- Access to culturally relevant standardized testing
- School food programs
- Safe and quiet study places (at school, at home, in community)
- Access to learning plans
- Land-based programs/experiential learning
- Experienced teachers (including bilingual)
- Materials, equipment & technology
- Family support
- Second and third level services
- Language supports
- Mental health supports
- Disengagement
- Co-op programs and career planning
- Access to on-reserve schools and fulsome programming

COO is currently in the process of seeking funding from Indigenous Services Canada to support a pilot project that 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. It is anticipated that the project will promote information sharing among First Nation communities and organizations and provincial schools. The project is designed to utilize collaborative inquiry to develop evidence-based strategies that address the

systemic gaps and track live student progress and attitudes over 5 years. The project will also identify and address factors external to education. Finally, the project will provide the evidence required to access additional funds and other resources and to develop various options for addressing multiple gaps to meet the diversity of learning needs throughout Ontario.

The pilot includes three phases and will be conducted with a representative sample of First Nations in Ontario. For instance we are working to ensure there are communities/schools with a wide range of enrolment levels and from different areas of the province for all three phases. We are seeking agreements with 20-30 communities/schools for the project. We have begun Phase 1 of the project which will identify educationally significant disparities in opportunities and outcomes of schooling and produce evidence that can be used to support negotiations for equitable funding. Participating communities/schools are being asked to share administrative data on student outcomes (attendance, gr 9 grades & credit accumulation, graduation, PSE), answer a principal survey about school-level resources and participate in assessments of student learning and well-being. It is anticipated that this phase of the project will be completed in August 2023 to inform the next phases.

Phases 2 and 3 of the project will build on the baseline data gathered in Phase 1 by continuing with student assessments such as the Canadian Achievement Tests, Version 4 (CAT4) for Grades 2 and 5, the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) for Grades 7-8 and the Early Development Instrument (EDI) for Kindergartens. Phase 2 and 3 is when communities/schools will participate in collaborative inquiry and share information to identify systemic gaps and develop strategies to address them.

The pilot project is designed to produce benefits for First Nation learners, families, communities, schools and organizations that will enable prevention and maintenance in the future once the gaps are addressed. It is believed that the intense focus on learning opportunities, key practices and resources will allow for building on success, building capacity and improving student and family outcomes well into the future.

We hope this brief outline of how the COO wishes to explore and address the systemic gaps in education systems provides you with an understanding of how we are attempting to improve graduation rates and successful outcomes for First Nations learners in Ontario. We are more than willing to provide you with additional information and answer any questions if needed. It is our hope that the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs will support the proposed 5 year pilot project, which will in turn result in sustained improvements in successful educational outcomes for First Nation learners.

For additional information please contact:



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