



Aboriginal Affairs and
Northern Development Canada

Affaires autochtones et
Développement du Nord Canada

First Nation Student Success Program **Success Stories**



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Introduction

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that First Nation students have access to the quality education they need to build a successful future for themselves and their communities. In 2008, the Government moved forward on this commitment by launching the [Reforming First Nation Education Initiative](#), which set the foundation for long-term improvements in First Nation education on reserve.

As part of this initiative, the Government introduced the [First Nation Student Success Program](#) (FNSSP). This program was created to provide support to First Nations to develop school success plans, implement student learning assessments, and put in place performance measurement systems to monitor and report on school and student progress. All activities are focused on three priorities areas of literacy, numeracy, and student retention.

Currently, more than 90 per cent of band-operated schools and students in Canada are supported by the FNSSP. In 2011-2012 alone, 35 First Nation recipient organizations participated in the program, representing 472 First Nation schools across Canada and implementing a multitude of innovative initiatives. These initiatives ranged from libraries and career fairs to professional development seminars and online learning systems. The Government of Canada has been working with First Nation partners across Canada to deliver tangible and lasting results for First Nation students through successful programs like the FNSSP.

The following stories illustrate the early results of individual recipients of the FNSSP with the support of the program. Each story speaks to the contributions of educators, parents, school administrators and other community members. The information found in the stories was provided by the recipients and highlight the types of initiatives implemented, and the measurable results recorded, along with the positive effects that students, schools and communities have experienced.

Education@aadnc-aandc.gc.ca

Improving educational outcomes is a shared responsibility. Governments, First Nation organizations, parents and individual students all have a role to play in achieving real results.



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What is the First Nation Student Success Program?

The First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) is a key component of the Reforming First Nation Education Initiative, which stems from Budget 2008. The program helps First Nation educators on reserve plan and make improvements in the three priority areas of literacy, numeracy and student retention. Through this proposal-driven program, participating schools develop success plans designed to increase efforts in the three priority areas.

Structurally, the program is comprised of three complementary components similar to those of many provincial models:

1. School success plans are three-year strategies for improving students' literacy and numeracy skills, and rates of retention.

With a detailed success plan in place, educators are able to implement consistent and comprehensive initiatives. Specifically, the plan enables educators to determine the types of activities, timelines and targets that will lead their students to success, and to assess and revise their programs to achieve the best results.

2. Student learning assessments require all pupils to participate in provincial standardized tests.

These tests help teachers identify areas for improvement. In so doing, the assessments also help educators develop specific initiatives and goals, and deliver more customized lessons and other learning programs to address their students' needs.

3. On-going performance measurements to monitor the progress of students.

FNSSP recipients are required to track a variety of indicators, including the literacy and numeracy test results of their students. These indicators ensure that the program is achieving the desired outcome.

The FNSSP values the firsthand experience of educators and provides the flexibility to create the types of programs that can bring about change in on reserve schools. Together, school success plans, student learning assessments and performance measurements help to give First Nation students the support they need to succeed.

Since 2008, the Government has invested approximately \$141 million in the FNSSP. This funding, along with the projects developed through the FNSSP, will help First Nation students realize their potential and develop the skills they need to succeed in the labour market.





Math teachers

at Mi'kmaw

Kina'matnewey

schools receive

the professional

development they

need to instill in

students a love

for numbers.

A Formula for First-Rate Teachers

Nova Scotia

Teachers that are engaged, confident and knowledgeable provide a learning environment that promotes growth and development in their classrooms. With the help of the First Nation Student Success Program, educators of this type are becoming increasingly plentiful in the mathematics departments at the 11 Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) schools in Nova Scotia.

To get their teachers more engaged in—and enthusiastic about—mathematics, the MK schools partnered with Saint Francis Xavier University to offer a post-secondary certification program that gives teachers a firm footing in the principles of the discipline. Through the program, teachers refine core skills, explore teaching strategies and develop the confidence they need to take command of a classroom.

Educators eager to learn

A cohort of 25 MK teachers enrolled in the Certification of Elementary Math when it was first offered in July 2010. Not even a month later, the program was in such demand that the university looked to expand enrolment to include non-First Nation educators from across the province. Bob Crane, the MK numeracy consultant in Membertou, is thrilled with the program's obvious and immediate popularity.

"I strongly believe that if we can develop math teachers who exude confidence and mastery of their subject, this outlook will be passed on to their students," says Crane. "Eventually, math comes to be seen as a subject of opportunity and not one where people apologize that 'I was never very good at it.'"

Primed for success

Teaching teachers math is only half the battle. It is critical that educators also learn to explain numerical concepts and operations in a manner that is practical, personal and even fun. The MK schools complement the certification program with research-based Professional Resources and Instruction for Mathematics Educators (PRIME).

Charting a positive path

Teacher feedback on both the certification and the PRIME training has been overwhelmingly positive. MK educators are teaching with more confidence and energy than ever, and student geometry scores, identified early in 2010 as an area of concern, have climbed as a result. Specifically, the literacy scores of students in Early Elementary Mathematics have risen 1.4 per cent, and the scores of students in Elementary Mathematics jumped 6.7 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools have promoted professional development for teachers of other grades and in other curriculum areas as well. Of nine mathematical disciplines, grade 6 students achieved higher scores than in previous years in eight of Nova Scotia's provincial standardized evaluations tests. Similarly, the schools' grade 3 students performed better than their predecessors in five out of six categories.

"Things are on a positive path, and I expect to see significant improvement across the board within five years," says Crane. "Within ten years, I hope that we will be facing a new challenge: non-First Nation parents wanting to enroll their kids in our MK schools!"

Tried, tested and true.

Developed in Canada by Dr. Marian Small, the former Dean of Education at the University of New Brunswick, PRIME emphasizes grade-specific professional development in subjects ranging from basic arithmetic to advanced calculus. More specifically, PRIME encourages teachers to address children's learning requirements through a wide variety of customized, kinesthetic teaching techniques.





The First Nation

Education Council

gets Quebec kids

learning through

local involvement.

Fulfilling a Vision

Quebec

When the First Nation Education Council (FNEC) was established in 1985, the association aspired to build on the collective strength of Quebec's First Nations to help Aboriginal children in the province receive a quality education. Today, with the support of the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP), FNEC is continuing to do just that.

As part of the FNSSP requirements to share lessons learned and best practices, the Council hosted its fifth Gathering on the School Success of First Nation Students on March 22, 2011. Nearly 75 educators—from part-time teachers to principals—presented strategies to promote literacy, numeracy and student retention in FNEC schools. Hundreds of connections were made. Dozens of ideas were shared.

These ideas ranged from study programs and meetings with tribal elders to school plays and haunted houses. Most of the proposals included a strong element of community involvement, and many were so well-received that they have already been implemented in First Nation schools.

Our projects, our pride

In the Micmac community of Listuguj, bordering Quebec and New Brunswick, children are now preserving their cultural traditions and learning real-life applications of academic lessons by studying the local salmon stocks. Students visit salmon hatcheries and even raise salmon eggs in the classroom to discover the value and fragility of the Micmac's natural resources.

In Mashteuiatsh, near Lac-Saint-Jean, administrators are using literacy and cultural activities to promote retention. There, students are getting involved in Innu culture through an innovative French immersion program at Kassinu Mamu Secondary School. By writing material for the school newsletter, the local newspaper and even public radio, the teens improve their fluency in French. And by volunteering for charities such as Meals on Wheels, the students learn job skills while developing a sense of civic pride.

Approximately 250 kilometres away, fifth and sixth graders at Ts8taie school in Wendake are jump-starting their scientific educations through experiments that apply classroom lessons about local rivers and the medicinal uses of Indigenous herbs to real-world settings. The 2011 class presented its findings to great acclaim at the annual Quebec Aboriginal Science Fair in Kawawachikamach.

Honing skills of another kind, students in grades 1 through 8 at Wejgwapnieg School in Gesgapegiag challenged themselves to read as many books as they could during the Read-a-thon. This exciting contest, which was part of the school's success

plan literacy initiatives, pitted class against class in a friendly rivalry. Eager not to be outdone, each grade assembled a giant construction-paper thermometer to track its progress and show off its achievements to the rest of the school. Community members, parents and Elders participated in the younger grades by volunteering to read to the students.

"It was tremendous. The kids had so much fun," says Brenda Ross Jerome, the Interim Director of Education. "You could see their eyes widen as they realized just how many books they had read."

Mapping the future

Afforded these exciting new retention strategies and ways in which to learn, students are now attending schools on reserves in Quebec and are beginning to understand the personal rewards of a good education. The province's First Nations children, however, are not the only beneficiaries of FNEC's participation in the FNSSP. Teachers within First Nations are also getting excited about learning different approaches to teaching literacy, numeracy and community involvement.

"The new activities are getting the kids engaged like never before," says one teacher. "I'm already looking forward to next year's School Success Gathering. I only wish that we had started meeting like this years ago."





*An innovative
program helps Innu
children discover their
love of reading.*

Partners in Learning

Quebec

All children have a right to basic quality education geared to their needs and aspirations. The Innus in Quebec mainly speak French as the second language. For young Innu, success largely depends on their mastery of French.

A subsidy granted to the FNSSP enables the program to explore innovative alternatives to support the mastery of this language to students at the Innu schools. The innovative program to teach literacy entitled *Apprendre à lire à deux* [Paired Reading] is a program that has been tested since October 2010 in eight Quebec Innu schools that are members Tshakapesh. The teachers receive continuing training and a consultation committee was formed in order to support exchanges between the teachers who tested this program. The testing of the Innu bilingual students is conclusive. Indeed, the participating schools, the teachers and remedial teachers, affirm that this program contributes to young students' reading ability and also positively influences their interest in reading.

A solid foundation

Apprendre à lire à deux is an adaptation of the very popular teaching Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (STAKES) program established by Douglas and Lynn Fuchs at Vanderbilt University. The fruit of more than ten years of research and development, the teaching approach of PALS is deceptively simple.

A culturally adapted program

According to a study by Tshakapesh, the Innu community is for the most part more oriented towards visual experience, movement, and nature. It is a community that is more simultaneous non-verbal than sequential. According to this portrait, the approach of the *Apprendre à lire à deux* program encourages young Innus to learn to read by taking into account the students' learning style.

The program offers more than 70 visual, auditory and kinesthetic activities, as well as matching games, inspiring stories and phonetic exercises. From 2005 to 2007, Eric Dion, professor at the Department of Education at the Université du Québec à Montréal, carried out an experimental study including nearly 60 classes and one hundred pupils from different backgrounds. The results were astonishing. The program helped reduce the number of pupils having great difficulties in reading by two-thirds and to generally increase the literacy level.

Year of experimentation

Since 2010, Tshakapesh has been working in collaboration with two specialized teachers at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and Mrs. Catherine Roux for teacher training and the creation of standardized tests for the pupils of the first cycle of primary education, grade 1 and grade 2 in the Innu schools. The results of these tests allow a satisfactory analysis of the young people's development in reading, beginning with the first school years. Tshakapesh will be able to publish the results of the analyses next year with the third rendition of the tests.

To date, the teachers express their satisfaction with the students' progress in reading, the interest of young people in reading, and especially the positive contributions of the learning-to-read program by pairing the young people. Moreover, the Innu students who took part in the study expressed much more interest in books, libraries and reading.

Expansion of the project

The teachers at the Tshakapesh Institute already intend to continue this project. As of the 2011-2012 school year, all of the grade 1 teachers have integrated *Apprendre à lire à deux* into their teaching program. The program has also been extended to grade 2, proposing new activities centered on vocabulary enrichment.

"The students are looking forward to doing the activities, they always ask about them," states a grade 1 teacher. "I hope that they will preserve the interest for reading and learning for the rest of their lives," she says.

Tried, tested and true

Apprendre à lire à deux consists of pairing each pupil with a partner; students who are struggling are placed with students at a higher level. The children carry out three half-hour exercises per week, during which they read out loud and work together to memorize the sounds formed by various combinations of letters. Unknowingly, the stronger pupils play the part of tutor. The teams are rotated regularly so that each child can be a helper.





*First Nations students
learn job skills and
the value of education
at annual career days.*

Occupational **Inspiration**

Quebec

Every school lesson reinforces diligence, but what about motivation—the other factor of success? Students in Lac Simon and Wemotaci, Quebec now have more than enough to go around thanks to captivating career days made possible by the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP).

The inaugural event—*La Journée carrière*—in Wemotaci was a student retention initiative organized as part of the school's success plan under the FNSSP. The aim of the fair was simple: to give students in grades 9 through 11 a chance to learn about—and be inspired by—the careers of accomplished members of the community. Hoping that at least a majority of students would want to attend, coordinator David Lefebvre of Nikanik Secondary School invited local professionals to get involved.

The community gives back

The response was overwhelming. More than 90 per cent of eligible students enrolled for workshops, and dozens of professionals transformed the gym into a Career Centre. Through a combination of activities, booth displays, and question-and-answer forums, students learned about the challenges and rewards of countless occupations, including several in the Canadian Forces and in the fields of mining, forestry, agriculture, construction, health care and human resources.

Making the connection to the classroom, many presenters strongly emphasized the importance of skills learned in high school to succeed in the workplace.

“One professional explained a mathematical formula he uses frequently in his work,” says Lefebvre. “It was the same formula our students had just learned in math class, and you could see them realize the importance and practical value of what they were learning in school.”

Learning outside the classroom

Of course, there’s no substitute for hands-on experience, and Wemotaci’s police and fire departments rose to the occasion with a variety of exciting and educational activities. Granted access to real equipment and facilities, students were treated to an inside view of the exciting duties of Quebec’s first responders.

The police workshop began with a local constable giving an overview of the training, procedures and duties of a peace officer. Students were then called upon to put into practice what they had learned

by solving a crime in their own school! Interrogating suspects, verifying alibis and applying for judicial warrants, the teens had a fun and engaging look into the world of law enforcement.

Not to be outdone, Wemotaci’s Fire Department timed students to see how quickly they could don the protective gear of a fire fighter and roll up a real fire hose. Wearing oxygen masks, students then charged into a smoke-filled house to save the victims inside.

A new sense of direction

Flooded with positive comments from presenters, Lefebvre was even more impressed by the student reaction.

“Our best results were the smiles on students’ faces and the enthusiasm in their eyes,” says Lefebvre. “By walking in the shoes of someone important, students came to a better understanding of what they want from their community, from their school and from themselves.”





Community Tutors Inspire Young Learners

First Nation Student

Success Program

boosts the literacy

and self-confidence

of second graders

in Curve Lake.

Ontario

The enthusiastic educators at Curve Lake First Nation School, in Ontario are continually looking for ways to help the school's 56 students—from junior kindergarten to grade 3 excel academically. Among the educators' most recent ideas, the one that showed the most promise was a community reading tutors initiative.

In its first cycle, the 10-week customized tutoring program offered the one-on-one support so important for struggling students. Second graders in the small community school north of Peterborough engaged in weekly tutoring sessions with trained volunteers from the community, and after just one hour weekly tutoring over 10 weeks, all made notable scholastic progress. Some even improved their literacy levels by as much as 20 per cent.

Beyond the impressive academic gains, students also developed a confidence in learning that will undoubtedly serve them for years to come.

"Students definitely benefitted from the one-on-one tutoring," said Louise Musgrave, the Manager of Education for Curve Lake First Nation School. "We couldn't believe how much more confident the students were within the classroom setting."

Building community support

The initiative is based on the research of Dr. Deborah Berrill, Professor and Founding Director of the School of Education and Professional Learning at Trent University. Berrill puts forth a vision in which parents

and people in rural and remote communities take an active role in their children's learning and, in so doing, eliminate the need to hire outside teachers or tutors.

Before the Curve Lake school could launch the program, however, it had to first find committed volunteers—a task that proved challenging in the tiny community of roughly 1,000 residents. Ever persevering, educators succeeded in recruiting eight community members by advertising in the local newspaper and sending notices home with students.

All of the volunteers received four hours of literacy-specific training, and spoke with the children to get their ideas on favourite books and activities. Meanwhile, classroom teachers conducted reading assessments to identify the students' respective literacy levels and reading needs.

Putting the program into place

"The teachers and the principal at the Curve Lake school saw grade 2 students as having the greatest need," said Aricka Fleguel, the program coordinator liaising between the Curve Lake school and the FNSSP. "Students begin Education Quality and Accountability

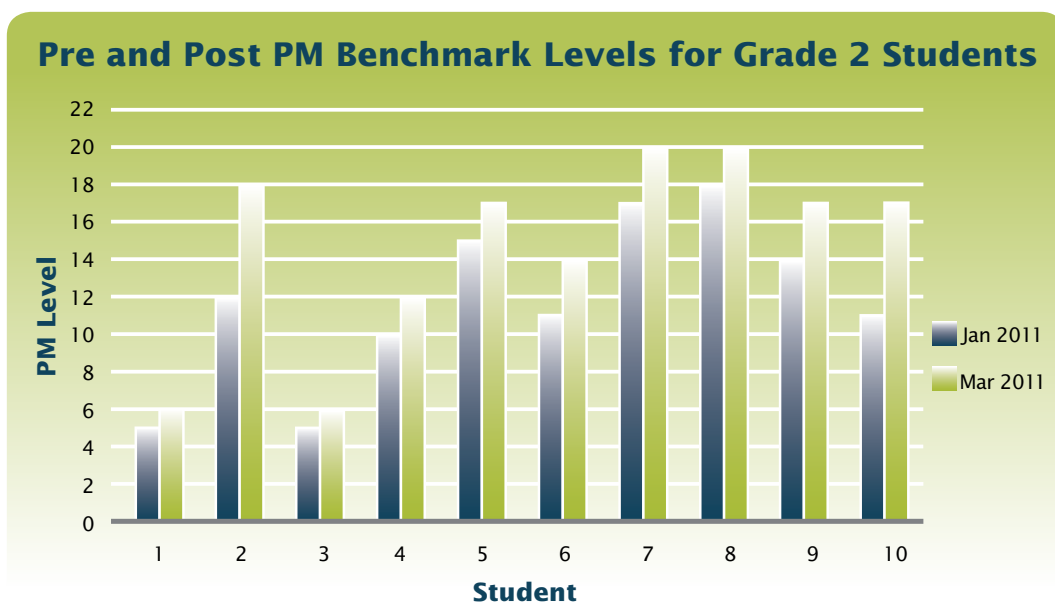
Office (EQAO) testing the following year and the tutoring program ensured they received additional support."

Each session started and ended with shared or independent reading, and incorporated stimulating literacy activities and games. A 20-minute debriefing after each session enabled the tutors and support staff to share their successes, challenges and ideas for improving the program. Berrill, Fleguel and Katie Wakely, the FNSSP Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives Facilitator, were also there to offer professional guidance.

Moving forward

Volunteers will work with the same students as they enter grade 3 in the fall. Meanwhile, Berrill will begin handing over the reins to the Curve Lake school; specifically Katie Wakely who will facilitate the program for the grade 2 students.

"The First Nation Student Success Program has really made so many things possible for this school that we would not have the funding for otherwise, such as the tutoring program. It has really enabled us to build capacity in our school and in our community."





Dedicated Teachers. Stocked Libraries. Engaged Readers.

Ontario

More students on Manitoulin Island, in Ontario are now readers. And the Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, a First Nation Regional Management Organization, attributes the development to Literacy Resource Teachers (LRTs) hired with the help of the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP).

The LRTs work in 10 participating schools to train classroom teachers, develop lesson plans and introduce efficient methods for recording and tracking performance-measurement test results. The educators also provide guidance on how to improve literacy levels within classes.

“Because of the LRTs, teachers are inspired with greater confidence and the desire to know more about literacy teaching,” says Debbie Debassige, the Director of School Services in the Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute.

Equipping classrooms for literacy learning

The LRTs work directly with principals and school directors to deliver Literacy Plans tailored to each school’s unique needs. The Literacy Plan at Lakeview Elementary School for example, involves collecting a variety of new literacy resources and building classroom libraries.

*Newly hired Literacy
Resource Teachers
promote readership
in 10 schools on
Manitoulin Island.*

“Good books are expensive!” says Karen McColman, Literacy Resource Teacher at Lakeview School. “We’re grateful to FNSSP for funding the school’s purchase of high-interest books. Seeing the excited faces of students as they use their new libraries, and listening to their eager reading is a true delight.”

McColman works individually with classroom teachers to choose appealing books from different genres. She organizes the books when they arrive and labels them for specific reading levels. She also assesses the ever-changing literacy needs of the students and continues to expand the school’s Bookbag Program.

Linking school and home

The Bookbag Program is a lending library for students, which matches children with books that are of an appropriate reading level. Black-and-white photocopies that were once the school’s only literacy resources have been replaced with new books that have glossy covers and colour pictures, and now more than 45 students bring books home regularly.

The program teaches pupils how to select appropriate books for themselves, and motivates young readers to challenge their skills and experiment with different genres. As such, the program helps students avoid the frustration of reading stories that are too easy or too difficult. It also encourages parents to help their children read, retell and summarize stories at home.

“Through the FNSSP initiative, we have been able to double the amount of books we have in our Bookbag Program,” says McColman. “Now, the students are reading books that are just right.”

Getting parents involved

To further promote reading in the home, Lakeview School hosts regular family literacy workshops. Just one family attended the first event, but organizers were not discouraged. Each workshop

“Seeing the excited faces of students as they use their new libraries, and listening to their eager reading is a true delight.”



now draws between 25 to 45 people, including parents, grandparents, friends and students.

Everyone engages in literacy activities designed to promote involvement, reading enjoyment and parent and child learning. And each participant leaves with books and games to improve reading skills at home.

Educators from Lakeview School and Frontier College teach workshop

participants how children learn to read, what happens to children's brains when they enter school, and some of the roadblocks students face.

"More importantly, we teach how kids can work through those obstacles and learn to love reading," says McColman. "With the support of the FNSSP, LRTs have been able to get teachers, parents and the whole community on Manitoulin Island involved in improving the literacy of our children."



Cook. Eat. Learn.

*Manitoulin Island
students are keen
to stay in school to
prepare and enjoy
healthy soup lunches
and continental
breakfasts.*

Ontario

The Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute Secondary School can now continue its weekly nutrition initiative thanks to support from the First Nation Student Success Program. The Lunch and Breakfast program is part of a school success plan aimed at keeping teens in school, and the Institute's whole student population is involved.

Through the program, students receive the healthy food they need to concentrate on tasks, achieve success in class and stay motivated to complete their education. Nutritious snacks such as muffins, yogurts and fruits are available each day and, on Mondays and Wednesdays, the high school students enjoy a soup lunch.

Feeding a sense of community

The benefit of the program is obvious to everyone in the community. So obvious, in fact, that the M'Chigeeng Elders' Group has offered its services. The Elders prepare lunch for the school on Mondays and, in return, students help them plant and harvest the community garden. On Wednesdays, students and staff prepare a soup lunch themselves with recipes found on the Internet and ingredients purchased from the local store. Students request their favourites and continually put forward new ideas to try.

"There is always a lot of anticipation in the air!" says Brian Bisson, the Education Counselor at the school. "Teens are excited about what they'll learn next."

Fostering an appetite for learning

Staff seize opportunities each week to teach students new cooking skills—life lessons that will serve the young people for years to come. Small groups of students take turns cooking and cleaning up each week, and all students are responsible for cleaning their own bowls and spoons after the meal.

"It's a great opportunity for students and staff to spend time together," says Bisson. "They get to know each other better and become more comfortable with one another as they share stories about trying different recipes at home."

Encouraged by these new relationships, students are more interested in school-related activities and more motivated to apply themselves in the classroom. Even those who struggle academically now have a compelling reason to overcome their challenges and stay in school. When hungry, a student can have a healthy snack, and there is always delicious soup on Monday and Wednesday to look forward to!

*Streamlined data
management lets
teachers attend
to students,
not paperwork.*

Crunching the Numbers

Manitoba

Every minute an educator devotes to administration is 60 seconds not spent teaching students the skills they need to succeed. To maximize learning time, therefore, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC) partnered with the First Nation Student Success Program to give teachers tools to track student attendance and performance easily and immediately.

Picking the right program

In 2010, the MFNERC assembled an advisory committee of First Nation school administrators to research an appropriate data-management system for Manitoba's First Nation schools. After an extensive selection process, the advisory committee selected the software suite that offered the strongest combination of flexibility, functionality and customization.

This new data-management system developed by Maplewood automates the management of school data efficiently and accurately. Educators can access student records instantly on a centralized web database, and monitor and update timetables, performance reports, attendance sheets and information on special education initiatives in a matter of minutes. As a result, teachers can quickly get back to what they do best: nurturing young minds.

Putting the pieces together

Implementing the program in all of Manitoba's First Nation schools has proved to be a major undertaking. Rural areas frequently have limited Internet connectivity, and some schools do not have internal networks or computers in the classroom.

Despite these challenges, an increasing number of schools are eager to get on board. The MFNERC's directors have set an ambitious goal to bring the system online in every Manitoba First Nation school by 2013. The system is already helping in the administration of 20 First Nation schools, and will be installed in 15 more by the end of the year.

Mitigation risks in the data management project has focused on providing appropriate supports to schools. On-site and remote training for staff is now available to the schools free of cost. Hardware and equipment have been upgraded and upgrades to internet access and negotiations with local internet service providers has contributed

to improved database performance. These basic elements of training, computer equipment, and effective connectivity will limit any exposed risk.

To ensure schools get the most from the sophisticated software, the MFNERC specialists travel to every First Nation community to train local community catalysts. The MFNERC has also assigned each school a local ‘information worker’ who is intimately familiar with the application’s functionality. As a result, the few issues that arise are usually resolved promptly on site.

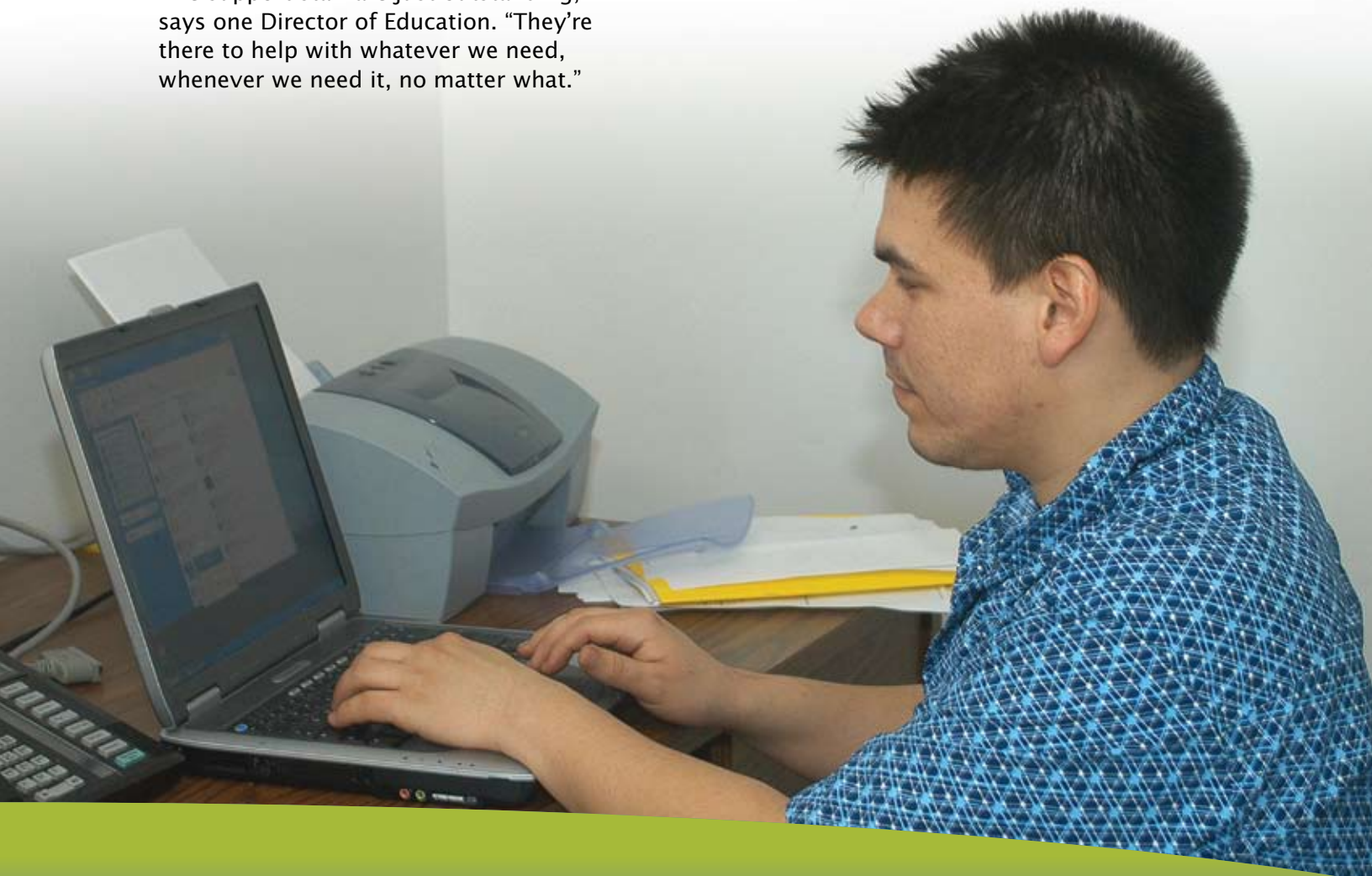
In the rare event that a user on location cannot find a ready fix, the MFNERC technicians are available for troubleshooting and repairs. Schools can also call MFNERC’s helpdesk in Swan Lake.

“The support staff are just outstanding,” says one Director of Education. “They’re there to help with whatever we need, whenever we need it, no matter what.”

Reaping the rewards

Thanks to the MFNERC’s initiative in adopting the new system, federal and provincial reporting is accomplished in a matter of hours, instead of days or even weeks. This acceleration of administrative tasks has contributed to a sharp drop in teacher turnover. School administrators will use the data management system to make data driven decisions for school improvement plans. Data driven processes are a key component in the school improvement process.

Students are benefitting as well. Students records migrated from school to school contain all pertinent student data. Students can transfer between schools with full confidence that not a day of learning will be lost.





From Support to Inspiration

Battleford Agency

Tribal Chiefs celebrate

achievements in

classroom literacy

and engagement

thanks to the First

Nation Student

Success Program.

Saskatchewan

Funding provided by the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) has enabled the Battleford Agency Tribal Chiefs (BATC), in Saskatchewan to purchase much needed material and equipment, and even more importantly, invest in rigorous and ongoing teacher training.

“The number one indicator of student success is teacher expertise,” said Lynn Semchuk, the literacy consultant for BATC. “Now, through the FNSSP, we’re able to invest in teacher training—an area guaranteed to pay substantial dividends.”

Through monthly sessions with a board-appointed reading specialist, teachers master innovative teaching methods, such as inquiry-based learning and repeated reading instruction. Between meetings, teachers receive ongoing support from education assistants (EAs) who work one-on-one with students to improve their reading skills. Consequently, teachers can now devote more time to professional development, whereby they learn to identify students’ challenges as they arise.

Early intervention is critical

"Research has shown that early intervention in reading can boost a student's overall learning success," said Semchuk.

Assisted by EAs and on-going professional development, teachers use the Picture Word Induction Model (PWIM) and a stimulating library of new culturally relevant books to address the needs of the many students who read well below their grade levels. After the first cycle of this initiative, some students gained as much as three grade levels in comprehension.

At the same time, EAs round out the students' literacy education through weekly one-on-one instruction in the Repeated Readings Program (RRP). Only in place since spring 2011, the program has already changed students' attitudes toward reading significantly.

Success in every school

At Ahtahkakoop School in the community of Shell Lake, for instance, students who were previously nervous and self-conscious are now confident and excited about reading. In fact, the RRP here has become even more popular than some of the school's recreational activities.

Tried, tested and true

The Picture Word Induction

Model uses pictures of familiar objects, actions and scenes to prompt students to use their full vocabularies.



Tried, tested and true

Through the Repeated

Readings Program, students read short passages aloud and receive immediate feedback from a tutor on pronunciation, speed and accuracy. Students then re-read passages until they achieve a satisfactory level of fluency.

One reason for the popularity of the program at Clifford Wuttunee School is that students feel they are part of a team with their EA. This interactive relationship has improved not only their self-esteem, but also their school attendance.

An hour away at Moosomin School, a number of students are already reading books at their level. During a three-month period, an enthusiastic student improved her literacy by eight colour levels (out of twelve colour levels), which represents three full grade levels, and is now reading at her grade level.

The students at Saulteaux Heritage School are also improving daily as a result of the RRP and the EAs' one-on-one instruction. Their dedication to the program has resulted in a newfound joy for reading.

"I'm excited the RRP happened," said a grade four student from Sweetgrass School, "It's fun to read, and it makes me feel good."

Many students across the BATC share the same sentiment, and the improved attitude towards literacy has translated into learning success. The BATC is confident that, as students and teachers continue to gain self-assurance and skills, the region will have even more successes in the classroom to celebrate.





Teaching the Teachers

*Educators enhance
literacy programs in
Saskatchewan schools
through the Catalyst
Mentor Program.*

Saskatchewan

Some teachers are natural motivators. They convey knowledge, captivate their classrooms and instill within their students a genuine enthusiasm for learning. Fortunately, the skills of these exceptional educators can be learned. And the Northwest Nations Education Council has figured out how.

Enabled by the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP), the Council developed a Catalyst Mentor Program to cultivate the professional development of teachers. The program brings skilled educators into eight area schools to demonstrate pedagogical approaches, acquire effective teaching tools, mentor school staff and act as catalysts for innovative literacy initiatives.

“Since the Catalyst Mentor Program was launched, I’ve noticed a change among faculty and students,” says Cheryl Larry, a catalyst from Eagleview Comprehensive in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. “The teachers are engaging, the students are focused and the classroom is dynamic.”

Educators at the seven other participating schools across Saskatchewan are equally enthusiastic about the program, little wonder.

Tried, tested and true

Through the intensive

Levelled Literacy

Intervention Program,

educators apply specific

methods to small groups

of students in the beginning

stages of their education

to accelerate their progress

in reading, writing,

pronunciation and listening.

Current skills are boosted

up to standard grade

level and early learning

difficulties that lead to long-

term deficits are prevented.

“The Catalyst Mentor Program is probably the most valuable asset to our school’s learning culture,” says Sherry Detchon, Principal of Pewasenakwan Primary School in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan.

A collaborative approach to teaching

From Duck Lake to Cut Knife, catalysts such as Elva Krushelnitzky at Chief Napew Memorial School in Pierceland work hand-in-hand with teachers to develop approaches tailored for each classroom. The educators evaluate students’ needs, refine teaching practices, share success stories and work through challenges.

“The program has been a remarkable support for teachers,” says Lois Cameron, a catalyst mentor at the Willow Cree Education Complex in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. “Every day I witness the progress that teachers and students are making and I feel a sense of fulfillment in my job.”

In fact, as school staff become aware of best practices, implement new literacy programs and take part in on-site training, they experience a renewed sense of accomplishment.

“My love of teaching is rekindled,” says Jeanette Head, a grade 4 teacher at the Willow Cree Education Complex. “I’m eager to use the approaches and tools presented to me by the catalysts. And because I’m motivated, my students are motivated.”

Students’ reading levels soar

This heightened sense of motivation among teachers has translated into scholastic improvements among students. Attendance has risen. Grade levels have climbed. Case in point, grade 5 students at Willow Cree Education Complex scored a full grade higher just five months after catalysts led teachers through the Levelled Literacy Intervention Program.

A steady rise in students’ grade levels can be seen across the other Saskatchewan communities as well. At Eagleview Comprehensive in Onion Lake, students’ reading skills jumped an average of 2.7 grade levels in the first semester. Across town at Pewasenakwan Primary School, grade 2 students improved an average of 3.3 levels (out of 4 Diagnostic levels in their grade), and grade 3 students achieved an average increase of 3.2 grade levels.

“That is the closest we have ever come to provincial standards,” says Principal Sherry Detchon. “We are very excited about the progress that our students are making in Literacy.”

Such precise measurement of student progress is itself a signal of the Catalyst Mentor Program’s success. “Before we belonged to the First Nation Student Success Program, we didn’t have a commonly used, school-wide testing tool,” says Lois Cameron. “Now, all of our teachers use the Developmental Reading Assessment to evaluate students’ progress. Not only can we see pride in the faces of our students, but we can also track their scholastic achievements through facts and figures.”

Extending literacy to the home

Not all achievements take place in the classroom, however. Since the First Nation Student Success Program enabled the schools to hire catalysts and introduced top-flight literacy initiatives, educators have noticed more parents are involved in school activities and their children’s education.

“We have far more parents coming out to our monthly fun nights,” says Detchon. “What’s more, the number of parents who pick up report cards has increased by 47 per cent.”

Many schools have also indicated that parents are bringing more books into their homes and that they spend more time reading with their children. In 2010, 20 percent of families with children in Chief Little Pine School read books at home and just 10 percent ordered books. A year later, the number of people reading at home and the numbers of book orders both increased by 15 per cent.

“The programs are extremely rewarding and are warmly embraced by students, staff and parents,” says Ray Wanhella, an education consultant from Beardy’s and Okemasis First Nations. “The FNSSP has provided our existing programs with a tremendous boost. We witnessed the students accomplish incredible advancements in their reading levels and the staff is more positive and vibrant than ever before.”





Math and Fun: *A Perfect Equation*

Alberta

Early in 2011, the Morley school launched Mathletics—an online program for students of all ages. Not only have young scholars increased their speed and ability to perform a range of mathematical functions as a result, but they have also begun to feel success in math, many of them for the first time.

“I’ve heard only positive comments from the students about the Mathletics program, says Danelle Oosterveld, a member of the Stoney Education Authority. “They have all been sharing in the excitement of progressing to new levels of skill.”

A modern approach to math education

Launched with the help of the First Nation Student Success Program, Mathletics enables students to work at their own pace through 750 online numeracy tutorials and activities. Colourful graphs track students’ progress, and visually stimulating animations break operations down into easy-to-follow steps.

*Students at Morley
Community School
experience success
in math with the
help of a dynamic,
online program.*

“Because of the program’s personalized approach, our students are thriving. They’re solving harder problems and performing faster calculations,” says Oosterveld. “More importantly, they’re tasting the excitement of advancing to new levels of skill.”

Now, parents have taken notice of their children’s progress. In fact, adults now approach teachers at the school to learn more about the program and how they can help their children continue to advance their academic skills in school and at home.

The parents’ involvement is paying off.

Making rapid progress

Ten children at the Morley school have been recognized as some of the top students in Canada based on their skills and participation in Live Math—an interactive portion of the Mathletics program that tests students’ math abilities against those of other students in the same grade level around the world. By correctly answering math problems, the Morley school students beat out national and international opponents to earn progress certificates and gain recognition on the Mathletics website.

The Morley school students have done so well that even 3P Learning, the distributor of Mathletics in Canada, is impressed. Several students were able to make it onto the top 100-list in only a few months.

“FNSSP and the Mathletics program have enabled us to work within the Alberta curriculum, as well as according to the ability level of each student,” said Oosterveld. “We’ve seen the students make some really impressive academic gains, which will only become more evident with time.”

*“Because of the program’s
personalized approach,
our students are thriving.
They’re solving harder
problems and performing
faster calculations...”*





*Treaty 7 schools
partner with First
Nation Student
Success Program
to maximize the
learning potential
of young Albertans.*

Raising Literacy. Strengthening Comprehension. Improving Behaviour.

Alberta

The impact and success of the participation of the Treaty 7 Management Corporation in the federal First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) is obvious. The participation has enabled Treaty 7 schools to implement an array of literacy projects that have improved the performance and behaviours of students of all ages.

Raising the bar for literacy

A number of Treaty 7 schools, including Napi's Playground Elementary School, Morley Community School and Chiila Elementary School, have adopted READ 180. This interactive reading program incorporates group and individual reading assessments and instructions. Students work through learning modules to improve their spelling, diction and reading. Meanwhile, educators use dedicated software to track pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and provide specialized lessons and targeted assistance to each child.

One particular grade 6 student who attends Napi's Playground Elementary School provides a prime example of the program's effectiveness. During a three-month period in sixth grade, he received 35 incident reports for a variety of offences such as profanity, threats and bullying. After enrolling in READ 180 in December 2009, however, he was able to refocus his energies on education.

By June, he had improved a full three grade levels. Equally important, he had developed a renewed love of learning and a willingness to cooperate with staff and other students. In fact, he went through the rest of the school year without receiving any incident reports.

"He has made a truly remarkable transformation," says Brad Kropinak, the student's teacher. "And all of this from a kid who was on the verge of being expelled just six months ago."

Effective reading initiatives

A second FNSSP-funded literacy program at Treaty 7 schools has generated similar positive results.

Chief Jacob Bearspaw School, located in Eden Valley just West of Calgary, has been running the Fast ForWord phonics program since 2009. Students are excited by the modern, technology-based approach, and teachers are raving about students' improved literacy levels, increased attention spans and positive behavioural changes.

"The teachers also continue to comment on how their students' listening and comprehension skills are improving with time spent in Fast ForWord," says Danelle Oosterveld, a member of the Stoney Education Authority.

Educators at Chiila Elementary School, who also run the Fast ForWord program for their students, can relate to this success. One individual fourth grader always had difficulty with reading during the 2010-2011 school year. As a result, he often acted out in class, avoided doing his work, picked on fellow classmates and walked the hallways with a downturned head.

Tried, tested and true.

Touted as one of the most effective systems in North America for raising reading achievement, Read 180 involves three stages of age-appropriate reading intervention for students in grades 4 through 12+. The comprehensive curriculum with instructional learning is combined with individual assessments of students and professional development for teachers.



Tried, tested and true.

Based on 30 years of scientific research into how the brain learns, Fast ForWord helps students in kindergarten through grade 12 develop the cognitive capacities essential for reading, including memory, attention, processing speed and sequencing. The program supports an existing curriculum to help young scholars achieve goals and become better readers.

Since working with the Fast ForWord program, the student has shown noticeable improvement. His behavioural issues have decreased, he participates in class activities more and he is proud of his scholastic accomplishments.

A perfect complement

To build on the success of both the READ 180 and Fast ForWord programs, several Treaty 7 schools have adopted a third literacy initiative: Discover Reading. The program uses classroom instruction plans and progress charts to help educators prepare their lessons and provide students with the support they need to work through booklets and exercises targeted to the pupils' respective ability levels.

Another example of the success of this initiative, as well as several other programs run throughout the Treaty 7 schools, is a Chiila Elementary School student who began Fast ForWord in September 2010. The young scholar quickly advanced to Discover Reading, and since his preliminary assessment four months ago, he has improved nearly two grade levels. His self-esteem has increased significantly, and he enjoys working hard and learning new things every day. He has since moved on to the READ 180 program.

"The first three years of the FNSSP has benefited our First Nations schools," says Maggie Nielson, Project Manager, on behalf of Treaty 7 Management Corporation. "It has enabled them to obtain literacy programs like Read 180, Discover Reading and Fast ForWord, along with supporting the infrastructure to implement them. For example, computers, teacher support and Smart Boards. The students have achieved success with improvements in their reading levels and overall literacy, which in turn have increased their confidence. By encouraging community engagement, the FNSSP has benefited not only students, but teachers, schools and entire communities."

Tried, tested and true.

Discover Reading is an 80-hour program that makes new and struggling readers more aware of the language system of sounds and, in so doing, helps students learn to read and spell more effectively.



Stoney Education

Authority uses

music to increase

students' attendance

and academic

performance.

The Sweet Sounds of Success

Alberta

To improve the scholastic skills of their students, three Stoney Education Authority schools in Alberta focused their attention on the subject of music.

“Music education enables teens to build the self-esteem they need to succeed in the classroom,” says Irfan Pirbhai, a former FNSSP coordinator and special projects coordinator at Morley Community School. “As such, music programs are also literacy programs and numeracy programs.”

Improving confidence

The Stoney Music Factory program, made possible by the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP), has pupils at Morley Community School, Chief Jacob Bearspaw Memorial School and Ta-Otha Community School take private guitar lessons, participate in after-school band practices and engage in recording sessions each week.

Each month, more than 80 students from the three schools come together to perform in youth concerts and attend music-related workshops organized by the Legacy Children's Foundation.

"The success stories from the Stoney Music Factory are numerous and unique... they demonstrate the valuable effect music has on the well-being and scholastic engagement of students in our schools."

"Our musically inclined students now have a creative outlet," says Pirbhai. "What's more, they have an opportunity to experience success in school. Through their involvement in the Stoney Music Factory, they're given a whole new perspective on their potential."

Making a musician

The story of a student who came to class teary-eyed, desperate and clearly distracted one day is a particularly telling example of the positive impact of the Stoney Music Factory.

To engage him in class work, his teacher gave him a book about the music industry to read. When she returned to check on his progress a short while later, she was surprised to hear he was not enjoying the book.

"I was sure you'd like it because you're a musician," she said. But the student was amazed she thought of him as such. "Do you play the guitar? Do you play in a band? Have you performed in front of an audience?" the teacher asked encouragingly.

The student answered, "yes." And in that moment, it struck him. For perhaps the first time, he experienced a sense of identity.

He was happy for the rest of the lesson. More importantly, he comes to class more often and earns higher grades. He has ambition for his future and hopes to have a career in the music industry someday.

"The success stories from the Stoney Music Factory are numerous and unique," says Pirbhai. "Yet, they all have one common thread. They demonstrate the valuable effect music has on the well-being and scholastic engagement of students in our schools."

Conclusion

According to the FNSSP recipients, the projects and initiatives established under the program have helped to empower teachers on reserve to address student needs, develop comprehensive plans to promote scholastic excellence and measure students' progress. Educators have been able to implement promising new ideas through strategies that improve literacy and numeracy, and help young members of First Nation communities achieve success.

First Nation schools also reported that students were more confident and more engaged learners and they participated more often and more actively in social activities both inside and outside of the classroom. As well, students attended school more regularly, read more proficiently and developed more quickly the skills they need to improve achievement in mathematics and other disciplines.

Many of these initiatives could not have been possible without the financial support provided by the FNSSP, which builds on the Government's long-term goal of providing First Nation youth on reserve with access to a quality education that encourages them to stay in school and graduate with the skills they need to enter the labour market and pursue their career aspirations.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada would like to thank the educators, parents, school administrators, and other community members who have contributed to the successes of the FNSSP. Through their innovative ideas and unwavering dedication, they have helped improve the educational outcomes of First Nation students.



Education@aadnc-aandc.gc.ca