

Briefing notes prepared
for the House of Commons Standing Committee
on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development :
study on post-secondary education

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Briefing Notes

PREPARED FOR THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE
ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: Study on Post-secondary Education

WITNESS: Prince Albert Grand Council

MEETING: 28 September 2006

Mary C. Hurley
Law and Government Division

25 September 2006



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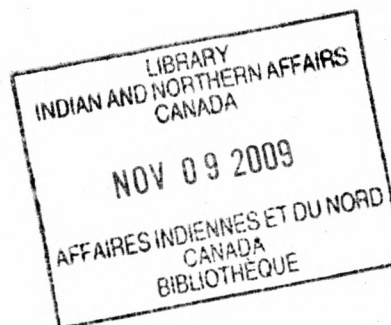


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STUDY ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

WITNESS: Prince Albert Grand Council

PRINCE ALBERT GRAND COUNCIL (PAGC)

The PAGC is a tribal council representing 12 northern Saskatchewan First Nations communities with a total population of about 30,000 First Nations members. The PAGC's official languages are Dakota, Dene and Cree, signifying the diverse cultural heritage of the represented communities. A broad range of PAGC programs includes the Child Care and Education Centre and education. The PAGC's Education Services provide "second level" services to 28 First Nations elementary and secondary schools and about 6,500 students. In recognition of the potential benefits of collaborative programming, these services were created "to provide a consistent, effective support system ... in a variety of areas." Within the PAGC, an Education Board and a Coordinators/Directors Committee direct various services and initiatives.

Source: Prince Albert Grand Council Web site.

Note: Some of the barriers affecting Aboriginal students that are identified in the literature are:

- lack of academic qualifications;
- distrust in education system;
- lack of access;
- lack of transitional services;
- displacement;
- discrimination;
- retention/completion;
- lack of Aboriginal-specific services;
- lack of cultural sensitivity;
- family responsibilities;
- lack of funding.

The following questions attempt to raise some of these issues.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

A. Demographics

1. We know that the Aboriginal population in Canada is younger than the non-Aboriginal population and that the birth-rate among Aboriginal groups is significantly higher than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians. This demographic picture has clear implications for educational programming to accommodate the growing pool of Aboriginal students, including post-secondary programming. Labour market implications for those regions of the country with significant First Nations or other Aboriginal populations are also anticipated.
 - What are your comments in these areas?
 - In your view, what are the consequences of not addressing the immediate post-secondary educational needs of Aboriginal students and related labour market needs for skilled and professional Aboriginal graduates?

B. Jurisdiction

2. Jurisdictional issues between federal and provincial levels of government have long been of concern in relation to the primary and secondary education of Aboriginal children, in particular First Nations children.
 - To what degree are jurisdictional issues also problematic for First Nations students wishing to access or enrolled in post-secondary programs?
 - In your view, do the same issues affect other Aboriginal students? If not, how do you explain any differences?
 - How would you recommend that any jurisdictional matters be resolved in the interests of Aboriginal post-secondary students?

C. Government Programs

3. The Department of Indian Affairs' Post-Secondary Education Program that provides some support to First Nations and Inuit students has come under criticism. Critics cite the lack of funding to accommodate growing numbers of eligible students – which some estimates place at over 10,000 – and the lack of availability of equivalent programming for other

Aboriginal students. In 2004, the Auditor General noted a number of deficiencies in the Department's administration of the program, and commented on the implications for equitable access.

- What are your comments in this regard? How is the PSE Program implemented by communities represented by the PAGC and elsewhere in Saskatchewan?
- What, if any, difficulties have communities encountered? How have these affected eligible students? How have Chiefs and other administrators attempted to mitigate any negative impacts?
- Do you have any recommendations for improving the PSE Program in the interests of First Nations students?
- In your view, how might the federal government address the needs of post-secondary Métis and non-registered First Nations students? Should the PSE Program or an equivalent program be extended to them?

4. In recent years, provincial governments have become increasingly aware of the need for Aboriginal-specific policies in the area of education generally, and post-secondary education in particular. Some have developed policy frameworks targeting Aboriginal post-secondary education, while others are in the process of defining broad policy goals for Aboriginal learners, including post-secondary students. In Saskatchewan, the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee advises the Minister of Learning on Aboriginal educational programs and policy.

- To what degree is the Prince Albert Grand Council involved in policy discussions related to post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, regionally, or nationally?
- What are your views on current provincial objectives related to Aboriginal post-secondary education?
- Are provincial objectives being put into practice through programming? What, in your view, is needed in order for provinces to address the needs of Aboriginal post-secondary students more effectively in the short term?
- Do you think the federal government has any role to play in this area?

D. Post-secondary Institutions

5. The Committee knows that Aboriginal students take post-secondary courses, including adult basic education, vocational training, college and university programs, at different categories of on- and off-reserve institutions, many of which are not Aboriginal-controlled, many of which are located at great distance from students' home communities.
- Can you describe for the Committee the different sorts of post-secondary facilities Aboriginal students attend in Saskatchewan? What relative autonomy or authority do these institutions have to grant certificates, diplomas, or degrees?
 - In your view, should the number of Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary institutions across the country be increased and their autonomy to grant certificates or diplomas strengthened, as some research suggests? What measures would be necessary to bring this about?
 - How would you recommend that difficulties experienced by Aboriginal students as a result of having to relocate in order to attend post-secondary programs be lessened?
 - Do you favour community program delivery as a viable model? Please explain.

E. Access to Post-secondary Education

6. Funding for post-secondary education for First Nations and other Aboriginal students, and low high school completion rates are acknowledged "access" issues of concern. Recent reports suggest that Aboriginal students face a number of additional barriers to their participation in post-secondary education.
- In your view, what other barriers exist to prevent Aboriginal students from enrolling in post-secondary institutions?
 - Would you say that these barriers are the same across the country?
 - To what degree do existing barriers differ depending on the nature of post-secondary institutions? For example, between on-reserve Aboriginal-controlled institutions and mainstream colleges and universities? Between academic institutions and vocational schools?
 - How would you recommend that the barriers you have identified be addressed? Do you know of positive practices or models that might have broader application in mitigating or reducing existing barriers?

F. Characteristics of Aboriginal Post-secondary Students

7. According to the research available, Aboriginal post-secondary students tend to be older, on average, than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, are more likely to be married or in long term relationships, and to have family responsibilities, including children. Many are single parents.
- In your view, what policy implications arise from these characteristics?
 - To what degree do you think policies or educational institutions take these characteristics into account when planning programs?
 - How would you recommend that policy-makers and institutions tailor programs to better meet the needs of older Aboriginal students with family responsibilities?
 - Are you aware of any programs that already do so?

G. Recruitment, Participation and Completion

8. From the increased focus on the need to involve Aboriginal students in post-secondary education, it would seem to follow that active recruitment measures should be underway.
- How would you describe current measures to recruit Aboriginal students into various post-secondary systems? Are they adequate, in your view?
 - What would you recommend to make recruitment of Aboriginal students more effective?
 - Do you know of positive practices or models in the area of recruitment that might have broader application?
9. Studies suggest that there are differences in rates of participation and program completion. It appears that Aboriginal students are more likely to attend colleges or trade schools, where completion tends to be higher, while university participation and completion are lower.
- In your view, what factors explain these differing participation and completion rates?
 - Do you think increasing university participation and completion, in particular, is a desirable objective for Aboriginal students? If not, why?
 - What practical measures would you recommend to work toward increased university enrolment and higher completion of university programming?

10. The literature suggests that educational attainment differs among segments of the Aboriginal population, with Métis and non-registered First Nations people having higher levels of education than registered First Nations people and Inuit, and off-reserve registered First Nations people having more post-secondary education than the on-reserve population. Different attainment levels also exist in different geographic areas, with higher levels achieved in Atlantic Canada, Ontario and B.C. than in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.
 - What are your comments on these distinctions among different segments of the Aboriginal population and different geographic regions? How do you explain them? What are the consequences?
 - What would you recommend to increase the levels of educational of those currently at the lower end of the education scale?

11. Statistical results show that Aboriginal women have higher rates of success than Aboriginal men in university education and certification completion.
 - What factors explain the relative educational success of Aboriginal women over Aboriginal men? How do you think the success rate of Aboriginal men can be enhanced, while maintaining or improving that of Aboriginal women?

H. Programs

12. Some research shows that post-secondary Aboriginal students are under-represented in some areas, such as the sciences and health fields, while education and social sciences represent over half of Aboriginal students' university qualifications. It suggests Aboriginal males with non-university certificates concentrate on engineering and trades, while women have commerce or business administration qualifications.
 - How do you explain the apparently narrow range of programs Aboriginal students currently take? To what degree might it be tied to the range of programs currently available in the various institutions?
 - Do you think it would be desirable and feasible for Aboriginal post-secondary students to be involved in a broader range of programs?
 - How, in particular, do you think Aboriginal representation in the health and other professions might be increased?

I. Transitional and Aboriginal-specific Services

13. Studies suggest that the availability of transitional programs or services to enable Aboriginal students to “bridge” successfully to post-secondary programs are key for Aboriginal students’ experience of post-secondary education. The availability of Aboriginal-specific services once they are enrolled in such programs is also seen as of central importance. The University of Manitoba’s access programs, and centres such as the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia are frequently cited as models to be copied more broadly.
- Do you agree that Aboriginal students view transitional programs and Aboriginal-specific services as important? Why are such programs necessary, in your view?
 - What sorts of programs and services are most successful in assisting Aboriginal students to make the transition to post-secondary institutions or programs and to provide support while they are there?
 - From your experience, what would you recommend to anyone planning such programs or services in order to ensure their effectiveness?

J. General Recommendation

14. What are your top priority and your key recommendation to this Committee to overcome existing barriers for Aboriginal post-secondary students?

**NOTICE OF MOTION FROM ANITA NEVILLE/
AVIS DE MOTION D'ANITA NEVILLE**

1. That the Standing Committee of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development adopt the resolution that the Conservative Government should immediately pledge their support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; that this be adopted as a report of this committee; that the chair present the report to the House.

1. Que le Comité permanent des affaires autochtones et du développement du Grand Nord adopte une résolution pour que le gouvernement conservateur accorde immédiatement son appui à la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones; qu'elle soit adoptée comme un rapport du Comité; que le président soumette le rapport à la Chambre.