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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to the 58th meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

We have a wonderful full room today. It's so nice to see so many smiling faces. It gives us good energy for our work ahead.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

[English]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. You may speak in the official language of your choice, of course. Interpretation services are available for this meeting in French, English and Inuktitut. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, Inuktitut, English or French. Please select your language now.

If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately. We will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your mike will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verifications officer.

[Translation]

All comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the Chair.

[English]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 21, 2022, this committee is concluding its study of improving the graduation rates of indigenous students.

Today, on our first panel, we welcome, as an individual, Ms. Ella Estey, who is a student with us in person. Thank you so much for being here.

From Kiuna College, we have José-Tomás Arriola, clinical supervisor, by video conference.

We had Ms. Tammy Steinwand-Deschambault, but unfortunately, we don't have the proper headset for interpretation, so we'll have to have her rescheduled for another time.

You will each have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Estey, please start us off.

Ms. Ella Estey (Student, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair.

[Witness spoke in Inuktitut and provided the following translation:]

Good afternoon. My name is Ella Estey. I am from Iqaluit, Nunavut, and I thank the committee for inviting me.

[English]

I would also like to thank the Inuksuk High School social studies teacher Patrick McDermott for his direction with my project. I would not be here today if it were not for his class.

I'm representing Nunavut's education system from a student's perspective.

The Government of Nunavut does not meet its own expectations of having a higher quality Inuktitut curriculum for our education department, which I believe is the cause for the unacceptable low number of Inuit graduates in the territory. Nunavut has an agreement with Alberta and uses its education system for Nunavut's schooling. However, the colonial aspects of the education system have created difficulties for Inuit to succeed academically.

This contributes to a lack of confidence in students to go on to post-secondary education, or they drop out of school entirely. I also believe that using Alberta's education system causes a sense of unimportance to the cultural classes that are added on to the foreign curriculum.

Multiple different strategies were discussed during Nunavut's development, yet they failed due to the lack of planning and incentives to have the strategies implemented in the education system prior to their estimated completion. There are many factors that contribute to the low graduation rates of Inuit students, but prioritizing the language and culture of Inuit will raise their chances of graduating.

The use of Alberta's curriculum in Nunavut schools is one of the major causes for Inuktitut-speaking students to not learn at an academic level in their language. Nunavut had been using the Alberta system before becoming an official territory in 1999. The use of the curriculum is to give graduates from Nunavut the opportunity to have a variety of options for post-secondary education, due to the recognition of Alberta's education system as a success.

This seems like a positive for Nunavut students to have the chance to graduate with an acclaimed education like Alberta's. However, it is not accommodating to Inuit students who wish to graduate academically, as well. The curriculum is taught and tested either in English or French, and there is no Inuktitut translation of this curriculum. There is also no Inuktitut evaluation of the departmental exams.

This leads to less motivation to attend post-secondary education, or dropping out of school entirely. According to Statistics Canada, in 2016, 48% of people aged 25 to 64 in Nunavut had a high school diploma, or equivalency, compared to 86% in Canada. On top of that, Statistics Canada stated that in the same year, 41% of people in Nunavut aged 25 to 64 did not have a high school diploma.

This is due to the struggles in the language barrier between Inuktitut and the English and French curriculum. The dismissal of Inuktitut within the education system causes low graduation rates for Inuit. If Inuktitut was prioritized, it would motivate Inuktitut-speaking students to stay in school and seek post-secondary opportunities, solely based on a better understanding of their education.

Not only are the academic classes taught in a foreign language to Inuit, but the cultural studies in their schooling are not set to the same standard as Alberta's. Since these courses, like Aulajaaqtut and Inuktitut class, are added on to the Alberta curriculum, there is no official evaluation set in place by Alberta for these classes, nor do they have a major impact on the academic diploma.

Inuktitut should be set to an academic standard for graduation. It presents Inuktitut and Inuit culture as something valued by students. Instead of having Inuit associated with an education system that does not connect with their loyalties, schools in Nunavut should value Inuktitut language and culture the way they prioritize the academic classes to ensure the success of Inuit students.

There have been several strategies discussed for the improvement in Nunavut education, yet they were never completed. For example, the Qalattug strategy that started in 2006 planned to have teachers from around the world go through the Nunavut institute for

research and educator training. It's called NIRET. The purpose was to learn Inuktitut from elders in hopes those teachers would have their Inuktitut teaching degree by 2019, thus having more Inuktitut-speaking teachers. However, there was little to no progress made, because of the lack of annual follow-up from the education department, not to mention that the Nunavut teacher education program had no requirements to plan any training program for these international teachers.

Another example is Bill 37, which would have rolled out a bilingual education system for grades four to nine by 2029, but there were multiple inconsistencies. Mainly, there was no commitment to have a bilingual education system for grades 10 to 12, and generally no plan for this to be put into action. These two strategies lacked the incentive to have the projects completed.

Inuit graduation rates can grow if we show the importance of Inuktitut for Nunavut's curriculum and prioritize the planning and research for these future strategies.

Although there is much said by politicians about the importance of Inuktitut in our schools, it is not seen as a priority to the Department of Education. Inuit students struggle to learn in academic classes due to the lack of support for Inuktitut in Alberta's curriculum. This has caused low graduation rates.

• (1545)

Alongside the absence of Inuktitut within the curriculum, cultural classes within the system are not prioritized as much as the academic classes, which misrepresents the importance of Inuit language and culture when perceived this way. The multiple strategies discussed over the years have not reached any conclusions because of the lack of incentive within the projects.

When the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was created, the idea of a bilingual education system in Nunavut was not prioritized. This has resulted in the Government of Nunavut's failing to meet that expectation, and it contributes to Nunavut's low graduation rates. This continues to weaken the value of Inuktitut as a language and the build for a better future for Nunavut students.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to José-Tomás Arriola and Denis Gros-Louis, who will be sharing their first introductory five minutes.

I apologize for leaving you out the first time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis (Director General, First Nations Education Council, Kiuna College): *Kwe.*

My name is Denis Gros-Louis and I'm executive director of the First Nations Education Council. I'm here representing Kiuna College, which is actually managed by the First Nations Education Council. Joining me is José-Tomás Arriola, clinical supervisor at Kiuna. I will be sharing my time with him.

Established in 2011, the Kiuna College is the only college designed by and for first nations. Kiuna's goal is to shape first nations citizens in a learning environment geared to their identity, culture and language. Kiuna offers college programs in English and French through accreditation partnerships with two Quebec CEGEPs. Kiuna stands out from non-indigenous colleges for its unique programs and, most importantly, its outstanding support services.

The student body is largely made up of indigenous people, and they have multiple unique needs. When students arrive, in addition to providing them with a quality education, we take into account their needs, whether psychosocial, emotional or socioeconomic. All too often, difficulties of this nature hinder their ability to learn.

Fifty per cent of students use psychosocial intervention services. Psychosocial services are therefore the foundation of Kiuna's mission and success. In addition, Kiuna welcomes students and their families. A third of our students have family responsibilities. To serve their needs, Kiuna created a family and children's program called Skamon to help with homework.

Those services need to address that reality, as well as the complexity of learning a second language for many of our students. We must therefore think outside the box to help our students and their families succeed, and do so without financial support for their unique circumstances.

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.

I will now turn the floor over to you, Mr. Arriola.

[English]

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola (Clinical Supervisor, Kiuna College): Good afternoon, members. I am José-Tomás Arriola, clinical supervisor at Kiuna.

As Mr. Gros-Louis explained, the psychosocial services are a critical support to ensure academic success, but they are also an essential element in a process of healing and reconciliation. The prevalence of psychosocial difficulties amongst students at Kiuna has multiple roots, but it is in large part connected to the identity and intergenerational traumas that have wounded multiple generations.

Our psychosocial services are composed of a clinical supervisor, a neuropsychologist, a psychosocial counsellor and two special education counsellors. These services constantly operate at full capacity. Per semester, we can have about 40 follow-ups and now close to 30 assessments of children and students. These numbers are the

outcome of students' and their dependents' being undiagnosed until their arrival at Kiuna, resulting from the lack of qualified professionals in communities to undertake assessments and follow-ups.

It is also important to note that these psychosocial services are unique in their form because they are culturally adapted and are offered under several modalities. They range from weekly individual follow-ups, group interventions on functional autonomy or community worker outreach to healthy life habits, traditional and territorial activities organized by our cultural life worker, and our intervention projects through physical activity and outdoors.

As wide, difficult, time-consuming and costly as these efforts may be, they work. Kiuna is proud to say that since their implementation, the number of severe psychosocial crises of disorganization—which mobilize several resources and often gravely affect the student's academic performance—has gone from one or two per semester to zero.

First nations know and possess the tools to combine healing and academic success. It is now up to you and your provincial counterparts to think outside the box and support them.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We will now proceed to our first round of questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Mr. Zimmer, you have six minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to our witnesses.

Ella, I see you have a whole bunch of fans behind you supporting you today in Ottawa. I just wanted to say a shout-out, and thank you for coming. It's no pressure at all, eh?

I see an article here from a few years ago: "Grade 7 students speak out about Iqaluit school bus overcrowding". You're mentioned in the article—you and your friend Vanessa. Your advocacy now extends to Ottawa. I applaud you for just standing up and being counted for your opinion.

We're here about graduation rates and how we could see them get better. You talked about dropping out being a problem, and we've seen that statistically too. It's a big issue, especially in indigenous and Inuit communities. You said that part of it is an English language barrier or an Inuktitut barrier in education. You talked about how there has been talk before about strategies to address those problems, but then you said that the strategies had not been followed through. I think that's where it lands with us to say that this can't continue or else it just isn't going to get better.

I was a former teacher. I taught high school for about seven years, and I went to university and all of that. I'm going to ask you a simple question, because I think that nobody can explain better how to fix a problem or how to do better other than somebody who has been through that system in Nunavut. What would you do if you were the boss? How would you make it better?

That's a big question, but what are some simple things that are just as simple as helping your colleagues in school graduate when they didn't before? What are some simple things that we can look at? Maybe it isn't simple, but what are some things you would recommend that we do to help that rate go up?

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you for the question.

I will say that it really is not a simple question to answer. However, in thinking about the situation and doing research within this time, my main goal to help really would be just for Inuit students and Inuktitut-speaking students to have that moral support from their teachers and to have that cultural connection. I believe that is one of the biggest motivational factors to go to school—just knowing that you are supported and relating to your teachers.

For example, my music teacher Mary Piercey, even though she is a white woman, does present Inuktitut and Inuit culture beautifully through her choir and her music class. That is honestly the main reason I love that class so much. One of my biggest things would be to have that role model to look forward to and to motivate you to go to school.

Another thing would be almost the reverse of that—for the Inuktitut-speaking teachers to have that support from their workplace. Many Inuktitut teachers do not get their Bachelor of Education, so they do not get all of the benefits that other academic teachers would get, like proper housing and things like that.

I believe a way to motivate the inflow of Inuktitut teachers would be to prioritize them physically in the system as well.

• (1555)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

We're kind of building on that. I appreciate what you said, and it's partly the answer that I'm looking for. When you talked about graduation rates, you said there was a higher number in other communities where the graduation rate was higher. You said it was lower in Nunavut, but there's still a success rate there. It's not zero.

I was going to ask you this: When going through school yourself, what did you see as the difference? You kind of already answered it. You saw colleagues of yours graduate, but you also saw other ones who were sitting beside them in class who didn't. Give me some examples of the ones who made it. What was the difference there? Why did they make it?

Ms. Ella Estey: That is actually a great question.

I believe the Inuit who have succeeded academically have an association with the curriculum that they're based in. They've adapted to the English curriculum incredibly well, to the point where they have a full understanding of their education and therefore have graduated.

Those, for example, who may have flown in.... This is mostly Iqaluit-based because it's a very multicultural city on its own. For an example, somebody who has Inuktitut as their mother tongue and moves into Iqaluit and goes to high school there can have an incredibly difficult time because they do not understand English at a full level. They cannot, therefore, graduate academically because of that language barrier.

I believe those who do succeed academically have that bilinguality and understand English enough to graduate in the Alberta system. In smaller communities, the majority of the teachers of the academic classes like math and science are also anglophone and speak English. From a smaller community's perspective, many Inuit kids probably do not like that class, don't go to school or skip that class because, again, they don't have that English understanding and, therefore, cannot relate to it culturally.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Those are great answers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

I will now proceed to the Liberal Party with Patrick Weiler for six minutes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd also like to thank our witnesses for being here today, especially Ms. Estey and the many folks who are here joining in the crowd.

I would like to ask my first question to the First Nations Education Council and Monsieur Gros-Louis.

I understand that in the past you've been a regular contributor to the Montreal Gazette and you have recently spoken out against the French-language instruction requirements applying to first nations schools following the passage of Bill 96. I was hoping you could share with this committee what specific concerns you have regarding Bill 96 in Quebec and how it will affect indigenous schooling.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

First and foremost, the federal government invested \$1.1 million recently in funding elementary and high school levels in Quebec through the 22 first nations who are members of the First Nation Education Council. I think it takes three to tango.

After spending a significant amount of money over the next five years to pursue, promote and support graduation, when I say it takes three, Quebec needs to be there as well to strike down all those systemic barriers based on French as the common language in Quebec. It needs to acknowledge that some of our schools and some of our students must and will continue to speak their language.

As part of the agreement that we signed last summer, \$4.6 million will be invested in teaching languages and culture in our elementary schools. When they reach college, where Mr. Arriola works, that's going to be like a buffalo jump if they have to be fluent in French, if they must give up their language.

One challenge we're facing is twofold. First, 92% of our students will graduate at Kiuna once they get to Kiuna because of the quality of services provided by Mr. Arriola. The challenge we're facing is that by not promoting our ancestral languages, 50% of our English as a second language learners will leave the province of Quebec, whereas 96% of our French as a second language learners will stay in Quebec.

To me, that is an assimilation policy.

• (1600)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

Moving on, I understand that the First Nations Education Council recently signed a regional education agreement with Minister Hajdu last summer. I was hoping you could speak to what that's meant for indigenous students and their ability to connect with their language and culture.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: As I said, the historic signature of the agreement is that it was designed by first nations based on real needs. Therefore, Minister Hajdu and the chiefs committee on education have been able to meet in this agreement to support our native language as the core of the curriculum. It will also promote a feeling of pride and ownership among our students, and it will boost our culture forward, therefore reducing the exodus that we have felt.

As I said, half of our first nations are using French as a second language, and it's key for us to maintain a skilled workforce, while at the same time, making sure we nurture our feelings of pride.

The issue we're having is that Canada believes that elementary and high school education are a core right, but we're pushing the government further to say that the federal government must incorporate post-secondary education into its fiduciary responsibilities. Back in the 1960s, with a high school diploma, you could get away and have a good career, but right now you can't do that. We need college. We need university teachers. We're actually working on a project to build our own university here in Quebec, but to do that, you have to get past college.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: The next question I'd like to ask is for Ms. Estey.

You mentioned Bill 37 in your opening, and the importance of having that system rolled out by 2029. I was hoping maybe you could speak to that importance and what you see as some of the big barriers to having some of these many strategies that you mentioned and that have been articulated, and the challenges in actually getting those implemented in practice

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you for the question.

I believe that the major block going forward with some of these past strategies is that a lot of them are short-term based. Most specifically many are premier-based.

With Bill 37, the premier at the time was advocating for it incredibly well, and it brought up a lot of hope. Sadly, however, as his time in office ended, little was done with Bill 37. It's almost seen as reoccurring, where the bills that they're trying to pass... You cannot fix an education system in four years, so to base it on that time frame is incredibly difficult as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Estey and her colleagues for being with the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs today.

I believe there is no question that Kiuna College is a success story. In our study on education, we've heard a lot about motivating indigenous students, who need a different kind of guidance. Like all students, they need incentives and motivators to enable them to continue their studies and succeed.

How does that motivation fit into Kiuna College's activities?

• (1605)

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: If I may, I will answer before Mr. Arriola does.

We need to secure sustained funding. Right now, provincial government funding is only meeting 40% of our needs. As I said, with Skamon children's services, we're able to take care of the children while our students are studying. It's possible for us to provide a culturally appropriate environment for each first nation that comes to us. We even have two Inuit students right now.

It's a source of pride, and it leads young people to grow alongside their cousins from other first nations. All the culturally appropriate expertise we've developed over time has made it possible for us to provide that environment. We're one of the only CEGEPs that can claim they have a graduation rate of around 92%. That's really good when you consider where our young people come from.

I will now turn it over to Mr. Arriola.

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: Thank you, Mr. Gros-Louis.

Thank you for the question, Ms. Bérubé.

Actually, what's special about our students at Kiuna College is they have a plan for their education and are able to envision a better future for themselves. Various sources of motivation are put forward, and the question of children and future generations often comes up at graduation time in each student's short testimonial. They refer quite a lot to the idea of passing on the desire to be educated and have a better future.

On the other hand, our students often tell us that when they try to study at non-indigenous CEGEPs, it often turns out to be a disaster in terms of the adaptation and supervision they receive. When they come to our institution, they have access to a neuropsychologist, and that's quite unique. No other CEGEP in Quebec gives students access to that type of professional service. They can also see a psychotherapist who uses a long-term approach to psychodynamic therapy and may even offer to see them more than once a week for six months.

In addition, our environment leads to resilience through relationships with faculty and staff, as well as cultural life and educational consultants. All of this creates fertile ground for self-realization and solidifying a sense of personal identity through services that are culturally responsive and considerate of students' needs.

Lastly, I also want to emphasize our cultural work through physical activity and visits to the territories—our young and not so young people from remote communities often haven't experienced these things.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You've done a great job explaining what your college does. How does that translate into success?

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: Actually, Kiuna College looks beyond numbers and statistics to measure success. Mr. Gros-Louis told you about the graduation rate, but there's also success from a human perspective. Our students tell us that after studying at Kiuna College they are better able to assert themselves, to ask for what they want and need. Sometimes a student's time at Kiuna College won't necessarily result in a diploma. Some students come to our institution to access services and figure out what they really want before they move on to other institutions.

We also have the children who are part of the educational environment at Kiuna College. I've been working there for 10 years now, and many of these kids say they want to go to Kiuna College, have an education plan, and go further because they see their parents achieving and succeeding.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do the youngsters and students come from all over Quebec?

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: They do. They come from various communities in Quebec and from First Nations Educational Council member communities. Some are also our members' children.

• (1610)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You talk about the good things your college does. What would inspire other institutions to follow suit?

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: For us, having a psychosocial team as strong as ours, despite the lack of funding, has always been an investment, not an expense. Having a psychologist on site for several years is a luxury they don't have in the communities. We're very proud to have a highly specialized neuropsychologist working in

the communities who knows the challenges related to learning a second language and to working with multiple service providers. One of those people, who studied at Kiuna College, is an Innu from Pessamit who speaks the language.

When Mr. Gros-Louis says that psychosocial services are the foundation of our success, it's because they are integrated with academic success.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Ms. Bérubé, I would complete our presentation with a simple statement. Canada has just invested \$1.1 billion in an agreement for elementary and secondary schools. All Kiuna College needs to succeed is \$3 million to cover operating costs. It's a small amount, but it would make a huge difference in shaping the next generation of leaders in our communities.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Ms. Idlout, for six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses who have come to give their statements here today. I am liking what I am hearing.

Ella Estey, I thank you and I am proud of you.

To the students who are here from Nunavut Sivuniksavut, welcome. Education is very important to all of us here. I am glad to see you present here today, especially when we are dealing with a bill that pertains to education.

I'm proud of you for using two languages—the first language. You stated that, if Inuit are going to succeed in graduating from classes and if we want to see more graduates, we have to include the mother tongue in the education curriculum. This is something that has been a concern for us for a very long time. I'm listening to what you are saying today: The education system is from the Alberta education system. The words you said are very strong.

Now, I want to ask you this: While you are still going to school, do you have an idea of which needs have to be met? Do you have resources in place, or do you need more resources to ensure we see more graduates? Has the Department of Education been approached about the need for resources? What is there? Are you able to answer this question?

Thank you.

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you for the question.

There are multiple resources available within Nunavut, but they are not officially in the curriculum. To give you a couple of examples, in 2007, Pirurvik created a program called “Tusaalanga”, which is a website where people can learn Inuktitut in a variety of dialects with 24 levels. They've divided those 24 levels into three books called “Inuktitut Second Language Foundations”, which were used optionally in my grade 10 Inuktitut class. If anything, my Inuktitut is not very strong. That was the most Inuktitut I have ever learned in my lifetime.

Alongside that, for a younger audience, Inhabit Media create many educational books and have their 17 reading level Nunavumi series, which I believe can be an amazing resource for younger children—anywhere from kindergarten up to grade 5 or 6. However, they are not being used officially within the curriculum, and they're an optional resource. I believe it should not be optional.

• (1615)

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

I understand the word “optional”. If there were to be a vote about this, what would you want people to vote for, or what would you be looking for in terms of strengthening Inuktitut?

[*English*]

Do you have any recommendations for how to make improvements? For example, you just outlined the fact that optional is not enough. What would you do to strengthen it so that we actually see improvements in the system? Do you have any recommendations you can share with us?

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you. Alongside either partnering with Pirurvik or Inhabit Media to have their resources within our curriculum....

I'm sorry. Chair, can the question be repeated, if that's okay?

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Do you have a recommendation in place to ensure that this is not optional anymore but is an actual resource for learning?

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you. That was a better understanding.

A great example of this would be both the Aulajaaqtut and Inuktitut classes. Like I mentioned before, there's not a huge requirement within an academic degree. The only “academic” class needed to graduate in Nunavut's system is a grade 12 English class. All the rest would have to add up to 100 credits. They can be any combination of classes to achieve those credits.

I believe that the Aulajaaqtut class or Inuktitut class should not be set aside as an option. To value Inuit culture and language and to have that learning aspect, it should be at the same level as English in that you need to take a grade 12 Inuktitut class or Aulajaaqtut class to have that official requirement to graduate.

The Chair: *Qujannamiik.*

We'll now go to a condensed second round, starting with Mr. Shields for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's nice to see you in the chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin Shields: It's good to be back.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

As a former public educator and university educator, it's a very interesting topic. Thank you for your input.

You made one comment. Are there a number of students who move into the school for just the high school, or are they moving from out of community into a different community for high school?

Ms. Ella Estey: I personally know a couple of students within my high school who go to Iqaluit. It could be the option of their parents going there for work, and they then would go to school there. There is an inflow of students from smaller communities who go there for school. Yes, that is true.

Mr. Martin Shields: I think you suggested that some of those were having more challenges than those who live there. That's a challenge in itself, outside of this one.

I'll go back to the teachers in a sense, because it comes back to the teachers. I think it's the fundamental piece. Concerning outreach education for teachers from universities from elsewhere, San Diego was running university graduate courses by distance 40 years ago.

Is there a possibility that people who would be interested in being teachers who know the language, connecting and working with both an on-campus and off-campus curriculum for them to learn, could be accredited as teachers?

• (1620)

Ms. Ella Estey: The NTEP, Nunavut teachers education program, is affiliated with the Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit, where they do learn to become Inuktitut educators. The thing with that is that NTEP is affiliated with an outside university to get that official Bachelor of Education. I would believe that the NTEP program should have that Bachelor of Education available within Nunavut, and you should be able to get it there.

Mr. Martin Shields: You need to get that there.

The University of Lethbridge started four years ago with the Blackfoot to develop education teachers. They developed this four years ago and developed a curriculum for them to be involved. Also, now the language is being developed and taught in Blackfoot, not teaching Blackfoot. You can teach the language of Blackfoot, but they're teaching the curriculum in Blackfoot. We're talking like French immersion, and Alberta has more French immersion classes than anywhere in this country, but you have to teach the course in the language. That's the next step, but you have to have teachers to be able to do that. That's the critical piece here to get that connected. If you don't get that connected, then you're teaching the language by itself and not teaching curriculum in the language.

Now, the next part is to get those courses accepted as credits. I'm a former high school principal, and there are ways to do that. You need to get that out of the optional category and into the mandatory. That it needs to be mandatory is part of it. Get it out of the optional. That has to be a recommendation. It has to be followed up. It can't be optional.

Have you been talking about that? It needs to be done.

I'll throw in university and talk about wraparound services. Is there outreach school for those who fall out? Is there an opportunity for them to come back? Is there any outreach school developed for high school students who left and then want to come back to an education? Is there any possibility of that?

Ms. Ella Estey: Chair, I would like it if that question can be rephrased.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is there an opportunity for adults who dropped out of high school to come back in and look to get their high school in your community?

Ms. Ella Estey: That, I am not a hundred per cent sure on, but I believe there is a high capability.

Mr. Martin Shields: In the Blackfoot nations on the reserve, that has been probably the most successful piece. They are having more students come back into the education system through their outreach, with high schools on the reservations bringing back those students who failed and dropped out.

They have provided them a wraparound service that gets them into secondary education. They do the wraparound to ensure that they not only get their high school but they find a secondary education level to go to. If you have a dropout rate, you need to have a mechanism to find a solution for those who are dropping out, but if they still drop out, how can you get them back in?

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you.

This just reminded me that there is actually a wraparound process, where I believe that at the age of 21 you are able to take high school courses within the Nunavut Arctic College, instead of being an adult walking into the high school. They can complete courses within the Arctic College in a more mature and adult environment for them, to complete the high school degree, and then can go on to post-secondary, so yes, that is an option.

Mr. Martin Shields: With the languages...?

Ms. Ella Estey: It would be within the high school curriculum, so whatever is....

Mr. Martin Shields: What I'm suggesting is that Alberta has taken the curriculum, and the indigenous have taken it and changed it to their culture and their language. That's what you need to do. You have the curriculum. Change the language. Get it done. You need it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Powlowski for five minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Ella, you talked about the importance of teaching Inuktitut and teaching about Inuit culture in learning and for the success of indigenous Inuit students. Certainly, we have heard from a lot of other people on this committee about those things: the importance of

language and of being on the land in terms of learning and also in terms of identity and mental health.

Also, if you want to be a good advocate for indigenous people, for Inuit people and for things that are of interest to the Inuit people, perhaps like Lori there.... She went through I think a lot of years of schooling, a lot of years of university. I'm assuming that she did an undergraduate degree and must have done pretty well in that, and she went to law school. Now she comes down here and probably is one of the best advocates for Inuit issues of anyone in Canada.

Similarly, if you want to help Inuit people or anyone else as a doctor or a nurse, again, it requires western learning. We have had other witnesses before this committee who, in terms of indigenous learning, talked about teaching kids to walk in two different pathways. Do you think that's the case?

In teaching, how do you balance those two things, those two worlds that you want people to live in? Perhaps amongst the students there are different desires in terms of how much you want to be in one world and how much you want to be in the other world. How do you balance those two things?

• (1625)

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you for the question.

I believe that in Iqaluit specifically it's incredibly difficult to find that balance within Inuktitut traditional life and the Eurocentric life that comes with work or schooling and things like that.

From a personal perspective, my family and I have been sucked into the Eurocentric lifestyle in Iqaluit. Not a lot of Inuktitut was spoken at home. It depended on the education system for me and many of my friends and colleagues to learn Inuktitut within the school system and to try to find that balance, because we are in school five days a week for a majority of the year. Again, we tried to find that balance, but it just was not successful.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Do you think different kids, depending on the kind of person they are, find different ways of balancing those things in terms of how some people want to follow more indigenous ways and learn more about their own language, while others may not be that interested in it? Amongst your friends, do you find that, or do you find that there's a movement one way or the other?

Ms. Ella Estey: I believe lots of my peers have started thinking about their own self-actualization and their own identity, and there has been an uprising of practice in Inuit traditions and cultural activities, again to try to create that balance, especially in Eurocentric towns all across Nunavut. From my personal experience, yes, I believe my Inuit friends and peers, even if they aren't so familiar with their language or some parts of their culture, make an effort to learn and to experience it while they can.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Do you find that making those decisions is how to find a balance? How much is that the result of the input of your teachers and how much is that the result of the input of your family members, your parents, your grandparents? I'm just wondering who motivates you more when you make those choices.

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you. That is a great question.

Within Inuksuk High School, there are lots of staff or teachers who aren't Inuk and don't speak Inuktitut fluently, but even if they aren't Inuk, they still try to advocate for us to find that balance, because they also understand that their workplace is not doing enough. Within their own time they try to advocate for that. Even in Aulajaaqtut, the core of that class is to understand Inuinnaqtun values.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My next questions are for the witnesses from Kiuna College.

Earlier, you briefly touched on the fact that students from across Quebec study at the college. Can you tell us about the recruitment process? How does the college go out and meet young people in the communities?

• (1630)

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Would you like to answer this question, Mr. Arriola?

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: Okay.

Thank you for the question, Ms. Bérubé.

Our recruitment efforts are ongoing. Of course, we need to consider that our pool of potential students is smaller than in the non-indigenous community. However, first nations people definitely put in a lot of effort travelling to the communities as often as possible to meet not only those in charge of education, but also guidance counsellors and teachers.

We're also in the process of setting up visits for the parents of potential students, who often play a decisive role in helping them choose their college. During these visits, we show them what we do and tell them about the services we provide. A large chunk of our communications activities is really dedicated to recruiting so we can reach potential students where they are, and that's often in the communities.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Ms. Bérubé, I would add that what we're seeing statistically speaking is that young people have a better chance of graduating and continuing their education if they study in a culturally appropriate environment such as what we offer at Kiuna College or in FNEC institutions.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

Do you also have special recruitment activities in remote communities?

Mr. José-Tomás Arriola: Yes, we have activities in all communities that might send students to us. The reality for all first nations students in Quebec is that they must leave their communities for higher education. So we're aware that they may experience uprooting as a loss of reference points, a loss of their sense of community and social support. Kiuna College's psychosocial services help mitigate these losses. We provide services to replace community support.

Of course, it's not easy to leave one's community, to leave one's people. However, we frame this change as a voyage of discovery during which the students will leave their community to become self-sufficient in their own way using our many types of services. As I said, our services go from psychotherapy to life skills groups in which they learn to cook, budget, pay for an apartment and so on.

Uprooting and homesickness can be hard, but at the same time, they can be an opportunity for students to become self-sufficient and develop various skills that will allow them to return to their communities as responsible, self-reliant adults and citizens.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You talked about services earlier. Which services—

The Chair: Your time is up. I'm sorry.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout has the floor for two minutes and a half.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have one more question for Ella Estey. Before I start, tell Pat McDermott I say hi. He also taught my children. He is a good teacher.

I thank you for responding to every question. You have responded with truth. I just want to advise my panel members here that in Nunavut there are 25 communities, and the cultural life varies in every community. I thank you for exposing what it is like, although briefly.

I want you to answer freely. How would you advise the students here? What would you want us to understand? I want you to freely answer these questions and just speak your mind. Thank you.

Ms. Ella Estey: Thank you.

I would just love for the committee to understand, as Lori just said, that every community is different. Iqaluit especially is a very Eurocentric modern city compared to the rest of Nunavut. On top of that, with different dialects within the territories, people learn differently.

I encourage students all over Nunavut to put up with school and really to just value their education while they can. It is an incredible resource.

Qujannamik. Thank you.

• (1635)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so, so much. Thank you, Ms. Estey, for being with us in person. Thank you to our guests online as well. Your testimony has been incredibly powerful. It's certainly going to serve us well as we do our study recommendations.

We're just going to briefly suspend as we set up for the next panel. Thank you so much.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: We're going to get started.

For our second panel today, we have, from Lac Seul First Nation, Sylvia Davis, director of education, in person. We also have, from the CASA national indigenous advocacy committee, Ms. Shannon Cornelsen, co-chair; and from the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, we have National Chief Elmer St. Pierre by video conference.

Thank you so much for joining us today. You'll each have an introductory five minutes. We will begin with Ms. Sylvia Davis.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Sylvia Davis (Director of Education, Lac Seul First Nation): [*Witness spoke in Ojibwa and provided the following text:*]

Boozhoo, Sylvia Davis niindizinakaz. Obishikokaang nindoonji.

[*English*]

My name is Sylvia Davis. I am a member of Lac Seul First Nation, and Lac Seul is my home.

Madam Chair and honourable members of Parliament, thank you for inviting me to be here with you today.

As the education director in Lac Seul, I want to share with you some of the amazing work that we are doing in the education department. I'll also share some of our challenges. I will do my best to cover as much as I can with the time I've been given.

Our community is a road-accessible community located in north-western Ontario. Lac Seul First Nation has three parts to it, three communities that we call Frenchman's Head, Kejick Bay and Whitefish Bay. Each community has an elementary school, and all three of our schools are currently exceeding capacity. We just completed a feasibility study and are currently working on a proposal to get a new school for our smallest community of Whitefish Bay. It is a very time-consuming process, which is challenging because we are in urgent need of the space.

At our three elementary schools, we strive to create a safe, inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. We aim to include trauma-informed practices in all aspects of our school programming, recognizing that many of our students have experienced significant trauma in their lives. I also want to take the time to emphasize that when children and families experience trauma, survival is first and foremost and learning, unfortunately, becomes second. With what is known about adverse childhood experiences, it would be beneficial to increase funding to be able to raise awareness and promote healthy families that have the supports and culturally appropriate resources to raise securely attached children who then, in turn, could focus on their learning.

We offer a nutrition program, ensuring that our students have access to healthy, nourishing food throughout the day. Of course, we offer land-based activities that are part of every student's learning experience through our outdoor education program.

In addition, we as a community have worked hard to maintain a high teacher retention rate, which is critical for building strong relationships between teachers and students. It is critical that students are able to develop trust with teachers. This consistency allows our students to feel supported and connected to their school community, which can have a significant impact on their academic success. Lac Seul First Nation is very proud of this.

With regard to our secondary students, we must bus them to the public high school in Sioux Lookout, which is 30 minutes to an hour each way, depending on where the students live. Despite this logistical challenge, we have support staff in the school to provide our students with the resources and support they need to succeed. We also offer incentive trips to our students, recognizing the importance of providing opportunities for our youth to explore new experiences and build connections with their peers.

Several years ago, a graduation incentive trip was organized. It was a huge success, and it is something our students look forward to upon graduation. The funding for this is largely from our own community's fundraising efforts. Our high school graduation rates are very good.

Having said this, we are not seeing great interest in post-secondary education. Since taking this position in our community, I am doing what I can to personally encourage young people to pursue a post-secondary education. I have shared my own experiences of going back to school as a mature student with two children in tow. It is not easy being an indigenous person in post-secondary settings. It is not an easy decision to leave the community and support system to relocate to an urban setting, either.

One of the biggest barriers that our students face is racism. As indigenous 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 indigenous peoples alone.

I challenge you to be mindful that some of the issues creating barriers that prohibit indigenous 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. In Lac Seul, we strive to mentor teachers and staff to be culturally competent.

In addition to shaping culturally responsive teachers, it is equally important to ensure that our educational systems prioritize trauma-informed teaching practices.

• (1645)

In an ever-changing world of societal stressors—including but not limited to poverty, violence and discrimination—teachers are required to not only understand but acknowledge and address trauma in their students. By establishing these trauma-informed practices, teachers can effectively create a safe and nurturing learning environment that prioritizes the emotional and mental well-being of the students. Teachers can then build stronger connections with their students, ultimately resulting in a more supportive, inclusive and effective learning environment.

By providing an education system that prioritizes trauma-informed, culturally responsive teaching practices, we can aim to close achievement gaps and support student growth and success.

Meegwetch. Thank you for listening.

The Chair: *Meegwetch*, Ms. Davis.

We will now go to Ms. Cornelsen.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen (Co-Chair, National Indigenous Advocacy Committee): Madam Chair, Chief Elmer and distinguished members of Parliament, hello.

[*Witness spoke in Cree*]

[*English*]

How are you my friends? My name is Shannon. I was born in Edmonton. I studied at the University of Alberta, and I understand a little bit of Cree.

It's important for me to introduce myself in Cree, because it is the language of my ancestors and because my mother is a residential school survivor.

My mom was taken when she was five years old and endured physical abuse, mental abuse and emotional abuse. She lost the hearing in her right ear when she was very small from something that a nun did to her. My mother is now 85 years old, and she suffers from something called post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is usually something that first responders or soldiers might have when they get exposed to too much trauma. It should never be something that children have when they are returning from school.

My mother will never recover from the events at residential school, but that is part of my healing journey. I have to do the healing for her. That is how you break the cycle of intergenerational trauma so that cycle doesn't carry forward into the lives of my children.

Wahkohtowin is a word in Cree that means we are all related. I feel that is the only way we can move forward into the future, by treating each other with the respect and love that we have for family.

We have positive role models today, like Governor General Mary Simon, MP Idlout, Dr. James Makokis and scholars like Dr. Chris

Andersen and Dr. Billy-Ray Belcourt. They are all contributing to this new world of indigeneity, where there are strong, educated, positive individuals.

What we need to do, though, is to have this open and positive dialogue with all of our non-indigenous communities and allies so that we can all start to heal from some of these intergenerational traumas.

Wahkohtowin—if we're all related, then I hope that all of you can empathize with the need for more financial supports to indigenous students, modified terms of reference for the indigenous skills and employment training program and less systemic racism within our post-secondary institutions.

That is what I am here to discuss today as the co-chair of the national indigenous advocacy committee of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. I'm passionate about how indigenous students can be better supported in post-secondary education. There are many gaps and barriers for indigenous students accessing higher education.

In my own experience as an indigenous student, my band funding was denied. They explained to me that they could only afford to fund 15 high school students. As a mature student, I didn't qualify for any of that. I was then redirected to the Freehorse Family Wellness Society, and I was receiving funding from their post-secondary fund. I also had to apply to the Canada student loans program. For me, there is no such thing as a free education. That is a myth that is perpetuated in Canadian society. It doesn't exist.

My story is only one of many indigenous students who struggle to secure funding for their post-secondary education. In order to reduce these barriers for students, I'm asking this committee to consider the following.

Increase funding to the post-secondary student support program, known as PSSSP. This program is a major source of funding for indigenous students. However, because indigenous youth are one of the fastest-growing demographics, the program doesn't have enough funding to meet the demand.

We're also asking that the government modify the terms of reference for the indigenous student employment training agreements, known as the ISET agreements, to remove ties to funding post-secondary education to labour market outcomes. Since these agreements and their funding are tied to labour market outcomes, this limits the funding for certain educational programs that are deemed less than beneficial for the labour market. It therefore compromises the availability of programs for indigenous learners and violates indigenous treaty rights established in the numbered treaties.

● (1650)

If we want indigenous students to thrive, we also need their communities and their culture to thrive. We need to ensure that they can access post-secondary education and freely choose their programs of study.

I ask this committee to remember that we are all related. Improvement for one is an improvement for all.

I will happily take your questions.

Hay-hay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to National Chief Elmer St. Pierre.

You have five minutes.

National Chief Elmer St. Pierre (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples): *Boozhoo. Aanii. Sekoh.*

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking on the ancestral territory of the first nations, Métis and Inuit people in Winnipeg, Treaty 1.

I would also like to thank Madam Chair and the INAN committee for inviting me here today.

As CAP's national chief, I know we have been advocating for this for over 50 years. One of our biggest priorities is education for our youth. Two and half years ago, when I was elected, that was one of my platform speeches. I wanted to make sure our youth had access to funding for education.

I believe our outcomes for education for our students are very high. Those kids who are going on to college or university, it's mom and dad who have put them there as well as themselves. They've worked summer after summer. Some of them have even taken after-school work in order to continue on. First of all, they don't want to fail themselves, nor do they want to fail their mom and dad, but the worse thing is that our students, through the CAP organization, have no access to get any funding whatsoever.

We've had dealings with Indspire and all they keep telling our students is "You don't qualify." How can you not qualify as a Métis person? If they have the documentation that they're Métis, then they're Métis. I've never heard of any other documentation they need. As far as being in the east and the south and that goes, we have to remember our leader, Louis Riel, was born and raised in Quebec until he went westward.

In any case, that is one of our biggest concerns because our youth—like my colleague before spoke about—we have to really support. We're asking the committee here to take that back and say, listen, in order for us to have good youth outcomes for college and university, we need to help and support them.

We sit back and we think, look at all those young kids over there on drugs or doing whatever they're doing. Maybe those kids wanted to go to college or university, but they couldn't because there was no funding for them to go. Where are they going to go to? They're going to go with their buddy, just hanging out in the streets. That's

our fault. That's your fault. If there was funding there for our kids....

We need more funding. There's no doubt in my mind that we need more funding. With the funding and the kids going to school, the outcome is going to be that they are going to be in good jobs. They are going to be working. They're not going to be hanging out on the streets looking for something to do or getting into trouble.

It's just sad to say this is the way we are treating our youth who are coming in. We've all at one point or another faced discrimination and racism, but what other forum for our youth, within CAP...? It might not just be CAP. There may be other aboriginal kids. What a great way to say this is discrimination against you. You're not going to go to school because you don't qualify.

I would really like to stress what our colleagues said. We need lots of funding. We need to put it so that our children, when they are coming up—and not just those coming up, but some of them who want to go back to school—get a chance to prove themselves.

Before I do say that, like the colleague just before me, I would like to ask the Creator to guide you as you make your journey for healing, and that he watches over you as you travel your way.

Thank you very much.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Chief St. Pierre.

We will now proceed to our first round of questions with Mr. Vidal for six minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all three of our witnesses today for their contribution to our study and the impacts it will have on the report that we provide when this study is complete.

I'm actually going to throw this question out to all three of you. I had a different strategy until I listened to all three of you, but I'm going to change my ways here. I'm going to give each of you an opportunity.

I want to reiterate that our study is about improving outcomes, including graduation rates. The bigger picture is education outcomes. It's not just focused on a little piece of it. In my mind, that starts all the way at pre-K through the post-secondary stuff. One thing we keep hearing about is that attendance is directly correlated to the outcomes, starting with kids.

You all have your own experience. I know the national chief is focused on urban indigenous folks. That's their focus. The ladies at the desk here are focused on other groups of people from where they represent and where they come from.

I want to ask you, in the context of attendance and that direct correlation, in your experience, in your situation and where you have an impact, how can we encourage improved attendance all the way from pre-K through post-secondary to improve overall outcomes in education?

I'll go in the order you presented. Ms. Davis, you get to go first, then Ms. Cornelsen and then National Chief St. Pierre.

Ms. Sylvia Davis: Lucky me. I was probably the most nervous coming in here today.

Prior to taking this position, I was a high school teacher, but the high school that I worked at was for northern students who left their remote communities and came to a site outside of Sioux Lookout. Attendance there was a lot different than it is inside a community where the students come from their parents. At the site that I was at—the high school I was teaching at—there was nowhere for the students to go. It was at the end of a dirt road in a beautiful setting. It was a peninsula surrounded by water and waterfalls, so they could go for a nature walk, but you could trust that they weren't very far.

For attendance, especially coming back postpandemic.... This is the first year in three years that we've had school every day. It's exhausting. Our staff are exhausted. Our students are exhausted. Now that it's April and June is sort of in sight and it keeps snowing, we're tired, as educators.

We try to have fun activities at the end of the day. In Lac Seul, our three schools have a different approach to ending their school day. They want to end it on a fun note, so every week the students have a handful or up to 10 activities, depending on which school they're at, because we vary in sizes, that they can sign up for. For the last hour of every school day, they could be crocheting, doing origami, doing drama or whatever the teachers and staff want to offer in terms of an extracurricular. Then the students are excited to go and participate in that activity that they chose to participate in.

That was helping, especially through the pandemic. That was one way we tried to focus on that in the elementary school.

With our high school students, we bus them in so they spend a lot of.... If they miss the bus, it's an hour to get to school. Since I've become the director, I've actually really pushed our staff to get the students to school. Their job isn't to get kids on the bus. It's to get students to school. We've purchased vehicles that hold numerous students. We're licensing our staff to be bus drivers, and they're getting kids to school.

Those are some of the ways that Lac Seul is doing this.

● (1700)

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen: Thank you, Sylvia.

Thank you for the question.

With regard to attendance, we also need to address the intergenerational trauma that is affecting entire family units in their home lives. That is a major aspect of why children do not complete their high school education. There needs to be a lot more support for mental health. Quite often, we have our own ceremonies and our own ways of doing things, which are beneficial. They ground us in our culture, and that promotes our healing as well. However, those things are not taught in our current curriculum.

As was mentioned earlier, Treaty 7 has some wonderful programs, which include immersive indigenous knowledge and teaching. That needs to be across Canada in my opinion. Land-based

knowledge and land-based courses are also another way to keep people engaged. They promote their indigenous heritage, so they are grounded. They would know why they are going to university and what is going to motivate them to other ISET program training, or whatever they need to be doing.

The Chair: We are at time, but Mr. St. Pierre can certainly respond.

National Chief Elmer St. Pierre: One of our main things is that it comes right back to funding. Our students, if they have to work after school, may have to work until nine or 10 o'clock, and they would be trying to do their homework at the same time. They're going to be really stressed out come morning, and they're not going to show up for school.

There are many things. As I said, we have to think outside the box on what we can do to keep them in school. One is to make sure these kids do not have to work after school unless they want to work to just have some play money, so they can go out and party if they want to party.

It is a good question. We should be thinking really hard. How will we keep them in school? Like my colleague said before me, many of our young kids don't know what our heritage is all about. I've got kids who come up to me and ask, "Why do you go to powwows? What's that dancing and drumming all about?" It's just simple little things like that. I grew up knowing about that, but the other kids, they don't know. They go to a powwow, and I don't know if they just think it's a big party, all the families getting together.... Actually, that's what it is. It is a big party for all our families, and we're not blood families. We're just families, and we get together.

Our children also need to know our heritage. It would be great to put it into a curriculum for them, so they can attend that certain class.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. McLeod, for six minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the presenters today. This is a very interesting discussion. I'm from the Northwest Territories, and I certainly agree with a number of things being said today, especially on the investment that is required for more resources.

I know that in the Northwest Territories, and I think it applies to Nunavut and Yukon, we have almost a two-tiered type of education system. Regional centres have a certain level of education, and most of the students who graduate can go off to university or college. However, if you live in a smaller community, it's a challenge going from grade 12 to university. It's pretty much impossible without some upgrading. A lot of frustrated students drop out when they get to grade 10 or grade 11. That's when they find out they need to do another two years of upgrading after 12 years. It's because there are not enough resources for the proper courses so that they can get into the big institutions.

We have a challenge with attendance because we have a challenge with housing. We have so many students who will go to school but who are falling asleep. They couldn't sleep all night, because there are so many people in the unit they're staying in.

Of course, we don't have the tutor support that is needed. If your parents don't have the higher-level education, they can't provide you with assistance with your homework. It becomes overwhelming for a lot of students. That's what I hear.

Of course, the sun is up until 10 o'clock right now in Northwest Territories. Kids don't want to go to bed. By next month it will be 24 hours a day of sunlight. The sunshine is part of our challenge to keep young people in school.

There are other things as well. There are no facilities in our communities for sports programs. A lot of children and young people just get so frustrated. When they do participate, they can't compete with the larger centres. By grade 9 there are hardly any girls playing sports. The girls are the ones who you really notice are dropping off by grade 9. If any girl wants to play sports, they have to do it on an individual basis.

There's also the culture shock of going into a larger city or a different part of the country where there are a lot of people. For many of them, discrimination is something they don't experience in a small community, because they're the majority. When they go to a larger centre, they become the minority.

There are lots of things. I'm hearing that we need investment, and I totally agree. I think we need a navigator program. We don't have staff housing, so a lot of teachers don't want to come to our communities. We should do a visit of some of the accommodations that some of the teachers are staying in. I don't have to tell the witnesses, but you'd be shocked for sure, colleagues.

I want to ask all of you to talk a little bit about what we need in the communities for investment in order to get to the level where we can start looking at post-secondary. In my communities, too many don't make it to that level.

Perhaps you could start.

• (1710)

Ms. Sylvia Davis: Okay.

That's a really good question. It's one that I've been thinking about, especially after I received this invitation.

Our first nation doesn't have an REA. I'm a little bit leery about it, honestly. I think there's some history with the government,

maybe, that is in play. I ran into Minister Hajdu this morning at the airport, and I actually approached her. I asked her why post-secondary funds can't be included in an REA, because 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. Then we're not running into problems like my colleague here had when she was a mature student.

I was a mature student, and I was fortunate to have access to post-secondary funding through Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, which runs out of Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay. Right now Lac Seul's post-secondary funds are channelled through NNEC. We're leaving it like that, because we may benefit more from it. We share the funding with the northern communities north of Sioux Lookout. If there's one community that has, say, five spots with NNEC and they only send three, it might be a Lac Seul member who has access to that funding.

If I pull away from there at this point... Without having the promise of our needs being met in terms of post-secondary funding, then we're going to stay there to benefit the community. But then, at the same time, it feels like we're stealing from another community, from some of our cousins and our bothers and sisters.

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen: Thank you for the question.

What we have identified for CASA... We represent over 400,000 students. Specifically for this indigenous committee, we asked all of our members what was needed, and the top three things we identified immediately were better housing, better mental health care supports and increased funding.

With the increased funding, we are asking the government and MP Miller to expand the investments in the post-secondary student support program to meet the program demand so that everybody can attend. We're also asking for the eligibility criteria for the program to include more than indigenous students, including Métis students, as well as students from the Northwest Territories, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Québec Agreement who reside outside of their territories for more than 12 months. What we are asking for is an increase in funding so that there's more eligibility.

To be indigenous in Canada puts you in a box. You are first nation, Métis or Inuit, and that does not necessarily describe the entire indigenous community in Canada, so we need to be more inclusive in that respect as well.

It's very disheartening when you have somebody in grade 9 who sees a system that doesn't fit them and finds no way or no supports that will move them forward. Quite often, these children—literally, they are children—are suffering their own traumas with their own families and their own addictions. Those are things that are part of that intergenerational cycle of trauma that is perpetuated.

That is also how we need to support our indigenous students in the north. I think it's so much more than what is available. They're working with a curriculum that is based on Alberta, which is south, and that's completely different from how a northern learner should be accessing post-secondary education.

I believe that we need to be focusing on those things and moving forward with more funding.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're far over time for that one.

Chief St. Pierre, you could add to that, perhaps, if you're asked a question from one of our other members today.

We'll move on to Madam Bérubé for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Cornelsen, since the committee began this study, the witnesses have been talking about the shortfall and the needs in communities. I'd like to continue in that same vein by talking to you about urgency.

In your opinion, is the education situation in your community urgently in need of attention? Do we need to call it that so that the federal government will address it as quickly as possible?

• (1715)

[*English*]

Ms. Sylvia Davis: Right now, our urgent needs are space and capital funding for a new school in our smallest community. We have over 40 students in a school building that is basically the size of a house with an addition, so we have 10 kindergarten children in a very small room, which is very challenging.

We have contracted someone to conduct a feasibility study. Now we understand that the study is being presented to ISC and we're going to be waiting in the queue. I don't know how long that queue is. We hope to see this before.... I don't know what we will do if we can't get a school in the next two or three years.

The Chair: It's the same question.

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen: When you think of the demographic of how many indigenous learners are coming to the age at which they are eligible for post-secondary education, approximately 130,000 new indigenous students qualify to join post-secondary this year and approximately 70% of those will not be able to enrol because there is inadequate funding.

When we're talking about the Canadian labour market right now, we know that we have an aging-out population. Here we have this entire demographic that is growing at 9.4% and getting larger and larger, and we don't have adequate resources to put them into post-secondary education.

There are no resources available for them and that is unfortunately, I think, a matter that needs to be urgently addressed. Our funding, the PSSSP program, is also sunsetting. It was guaranteed in the 2020-21 budget to have two more years of funding. We haven't seen any government recommendations to promote that any further than 2023. When a program is sunsetting, we still need all of these indigenous learners to get to school, so how are we going to do that? That is an urgent call.

The Chair: Mr. St. Pierre, go ahead, please.

National Chief Elmer St. Pierre: With respect to our first colleague, I would really like to stand up for her. You say there is urgency, but in her case, it's a crisis. She's saying that within two years' time she doesn't know what they're going to do up there. They need a school and they need a school now. Why is it that in the major cities brand new schools are being built and old schools are torn down? I don't know why, but they're being torn down and there are brand new schools.

I think within the next two years, maybe even sooner, we will be in a crisis because we're running out of space. Again if the students are going to come out of the north, where are they going to live? It's in the cities, in the urban areas. I really stress to our colleague where the school is going to be needed within the next two years that I'll even go one step further when I go back home in Ottawa. I'll write a letter in support of her and I'll send it to her. All she has to do is get me her address and so on through the program here, through INAN, and I'll support her 100% on anything like that.

Thank you.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have one minute left, Ms. Bérubé.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You were just saying that the federal government doesn't provide the funding you require to meet your budget needs.

What are your motives for asking the federal government to provide more assistance?

[*English*]

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen: First of all, that is a treaty obligation. Education is something that was negotiated with the government and indigenous peoples of Canada. I believe that education is a treaty right and they need to honour that right.

Indigenous people across Turtle Island, across Canada, have been neglected and systemically discriminated against because we have been thought of as less than the rest of the Canadian settler population. Quite honestly, it's time for us to regain our education so we can finally join in this western society that has already almost assimilated us.

So, yes, for me, further funding is required.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

First of all, I want to thank you for your presentation. What you say to us is very important. Thank you for sharing certain aspects of your lives, because as indigenous peoples we have suffered under certain regimes. We were oppressed by others. We are similar. We are indigenous. We're like a family. I believe that we are almost alike. We've been through the same experiences, because education was used as a tool for assimilation.

If we are going to keep moving towards reconciliation, and if Canada is going to pursue reconciliation, yes, we need funding to encourage reconciliation through education. What my colleague said, or what one of our presenters said, is very true. There is a need for new schools. I was in Hall Beach just recently, and they're lacking space. There's not enough room for students there.

There are many things still lacking that need to be met. There was a time when I was in Arivat before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. They were expecting a new school to be built, because the school they had was overcrowded. Once the pandemic hit, the funding that was allocated for building that new school vanished. Nobody knows where it went. Yes, there is a desperate need for funding to build schools.

[*English*]

After that summary, I wanted to ask my question in English because I feel like I can't ask it in Inuktitut the way that I would want to.

I would love for all three witnesses to answer this question.

We've known now for a couple of decades that education is not a part of history, but is continuing to be used as a colonial tool to continue to oppress and suppress indigenous peoples. Too many Canadians don't understand that, and that's why we talk about systemic racism.

I wonder if each of you could give an explanation as to why that funding is so important. The reason I wanted this study to happen is that I've lived this experience of systemic racism with the colonial education system. I see the struggles that first nations, Métis and Inuit have had and that we continue to have, yet we still continue to want more education, because we want to be contributing Canadians. Other Canadians would say that they're going to save money and send their kids to school, but for first nations, Métis and Inuit, we still struggle to have that reality because of the oppressive and suppressive policies that continue to impact our realities.

I wonder if you would have some recommendations you can share with this committee to make sure that we're actually trying to make a difference so we are able to say, "Here's where the money can go to."

• (1725)

I don't know how to ask in a simple way how you can help to educate more parliamentarians so that we do see actual change. What are your recommendations? What would you say to the committee? What do you say to us now so that we could see immediate change later?

Ms. Shannon Cornelsen: Thank you for the question. Thank you, too, for speaking in your native language. I really appreciate that.

Language—if you don't know your language, you don't know your culture. Education has been something that tried to strip away all of that language knowledge from us, but as an indigenous post-secondary student I am learning my language because I am reclaiming that.

On teaching the rest of the parliamentarians, I would ask if they have actually read the TRC report, because quite honestly that is very impactful for everything that we are advocating for here today.

The post-secondary school system is not made for us, but we're still doing it. We are still surviving with it. I would ask for education on our history and why we have these systemic issues—for instance, the Indian Act and the different ways in which treaties were negotiated. Even just the basic information on Indian residential schools needs to be common knowledge. It needs to be something that we can all speak on.

These are difficult topics. Unfortunately, too many Canadians don't feel that it's their purview. They feel that it's in the history books. It's not. We're part of that. It is a living part of our lives right now. We all need to be aware of that, so I would say that we need more education on TRC so that we can move forward with the recommendations. Money isn't going to solve everything, but it's going to really help to build schools.

Ms. Sylvia Davis: That's a really good question. I know that I tend to ramble on, so I'm going to try to keep this short.

Honestly, one thing I struggle with is the fact that not enough people acknowledge the fact that the education first nations peoples had prior to contact was amazing, and then, to have it ripped away from us through residential schools.... The education I have, I value. However, I don't have my language. That is a result of so many systemic and colonial things that directly affect me: the foster care system in Manitoba and my mother as a residential school survivor. I was just not taught. I've had it around me. It is something that I do plan on reclaiming. When you said earlier that it's important for you to introduce yourself in your language, I wholeheartedly agree. This is why I did the same. Unfortunately, that's all I have.

I know that there was a study on language. We definitely need that to happen. I just am tired of the mindset that there is one right way to educate children. If we can move away from that and allow some self-determination in our communities, that would be amazing.

The Chair: Chief St. Pierre is next.

• (1730)

National Chief Elmer St. Pierre: Something my colleagues have said is that we have to let people know what our ancestors went through. The government itself has to start reading some of the stuff like the TRC, UNDRIP and the Daniels case. Everything is in that.

What's the outcome, especially with UNDRIP? Canada signed on to that and is not doing what it's supposed to be doing under UNDRIP. Education was one of the main things. We can go through everything in there. Housing was another one, and different avenues for the aboriginal people who need it. UNDRIP made sure it was in there.

It's up to the government really. When you come to think of it, it's up to the government. Yes, we can sit here day after day and give everybody an example of what should be done, but if we take

this back and nothing is done about it, it just reminds me of the murdered and missing women. It's been 40 years, and we're still sitting in the same spot. We're just spinning our wheels.

I'm hoping.... In five years' time, are we going to be sitting here again? I probably won't be, but are we going to be sitting here again and asking about our education system? I hope not, and I hope the panel here goes back to the government and says, "Listen, we've done this time and time again. Let's start acting on it. Let's not put it up on the shelf and say that we'll get to it. No. Let's do something about it."

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much to our witnesses for joining us. I can assure you that your voices will absolutely be elevated. We take this very seriously.

I wanted to add that I have your document, "Reclaiming and Reimagining", from CASA. If there are any pieces of this you'd like us to include in our report, please submit a written brief so that we can make sure to put them in.

Thank you very much to everyone again. I declare the meeting adjourned.

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