

# backgrounder

## Gathering Strength – Investing in Education Reform 1999-2000

April 2000

Education Reform was introduced in 1998 as part of Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan. Resources are intended to improve the quality of education in First Nation schools and the academic achievement of First Nation students.

Consultations with the Chiefs' Committee on Education (CCOE) of the Assembly of First Nations in 1998 led to agreement on an allocation methodology and the identification of four priority areas under which initiatives would be supported. These priorities are:

- strengthening management and governance capacity;
- improving the quality of classroom instruction;
- increasing parental and community involvement in education; and,
- aiding the School-To-Work transition for First Nation youth.

In 1998-1999, \$10 million supported the introduction of more than 200 initiatives by First Nation schools, education authorities, boards and regional education organizations. Funds were increased to \$26 million in 1999-2000, supporting more than 320 initiatives. These strategies and innovations fall into eight broad themes:

- special education;
- language and culture;
- information technology in First Nation schools;

- parental and community involvement;
- professional development and training;
- student retention and achievement;
- career development and the school-to-work transition; and
- building insitutional and governance capacity.

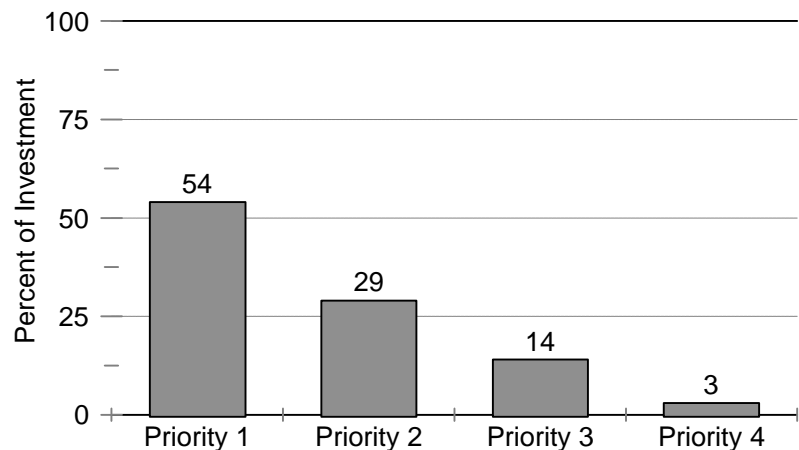
A closer look at where and how these resources are being used

suggests what the most critical issues are in First Nation elementary and secondary education. These regional variations – along with a comparison of school-based and region- or district-based initiatives – offer insight for future policy and programming decisions.

### Special Education

Twenty-seven initiatives are being supported that address the provision of programs and

Investment by Priority Area



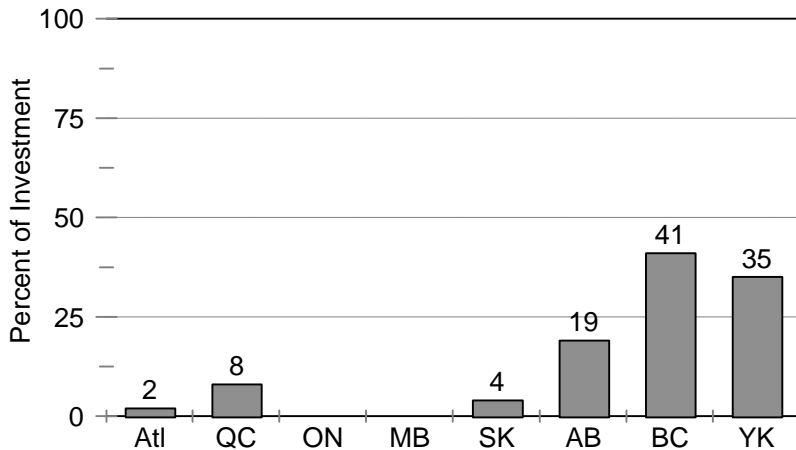
Priority Areas:

1. Strengthening education management and governance
2. Improving the effectiveness of classroom instruction
3. Supporting community and parental involvement
4. Aiding the "school to work" transition

Some initiatives were developed to address more than one area, issue or concern, and therefore may fit under two or more of the categories indicated above. In addition, reporting is incomplete in a small number of cases, where the amount of Education Reform funds received by a First Nation is indicated but the nature of the initiative supported is not (Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta).



**Special Education**



services to children with special needs. This includes the expansion of the comprehensive Special Needs Assessment and Programming strategy introduced by the First Nations Education Steering Committee/First Nations Schools Association (FNESC/FNSA) in British Columbia. This region-wide effort includes measures to improve assessment strategies and learning plan development, increase awareness of prevention measures and collaborate with the University of British Columbia to initiate professional development and support services to First Nation schools. Approximately \$1.6 million of FNESC/FNSA Education Reform resources are devoted to these activities.

Similarly, special education services is a key area of support planned by the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre for more than 50 First Nation schools. The centre's work plan identifies about 15% of its staff as special education professionals, including psychologists, speech language specialists and reading clinicians. As well, the centre is establishing a unit to research and develop strategies for the treatment and prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects. Approximately \$2.9 million (11%) of the national

allocation is serving to address special education.

Several smaller special education projects include classroom modifications to accommodate children with exceptional needs, the hiring of teaching assistants, the introduction of behavioural management programs, teacher training and remedial reading programs.

Regional utilization for special education purposes ranged from a high in British Columbia of 41% to zero in Ontario. First Nations in Yukon dedicated 35% of the region's allocation to three special education projects, while Alberta First Nations and organizations used 19% of

regional funds for special education.

Although identified as a separate category of resource use, special education services is an area of concern and attention in both First Nation and provincial schools, and is integral to most, if not all, other categories, particularly student achievement and strategic planning and policy development.

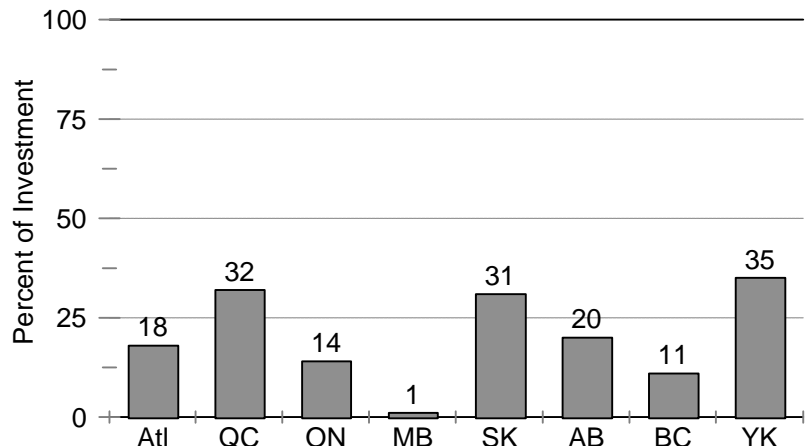
**Language and Culture**

The 80 initiatives in this programming category include efforts in researching, designing and implementing programs aimed at preserving Aboriginal dialects, history and culture through integration and infusion into school curricula and practices.

At 32% and 31% respectively, Quebec and Saskatchewan regions lead the way in applying Education Reform funds to language and culture programming, as well as in total number of projects (19 in Quebec, 23 in Saskatchewan).

Nationally, approximately \$4.4 million (17%) of 1999-2000 funds support initiatives under this category. One goal of the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre is to develop or improve culturally appropriate curricula, with a portion of its

**Language and Culture**



total allocation was used for language and culture programming.

Students of Liard First Nation in Yukon are using technology as a tool to preserve and promote the Kaska dialect. Students interview and record community Elders and generate exercises and activities as a means of learning the language.

Several First Nations in Saskatchewan, including Pelican Lake, Canoe Lake and Peter Ballantyne have introduced programs that encourage Elders to participate in and contribute to classroom-based lessons, outdoor education programs and cultural camps.

## Information Technology in First Nation Schools

Thirty projects supported the installation, upgrading and maintenance of information technology systems in First Nation schools in 1999-2000. Slightly more than \$1.4 million (5%) in Education Reform investment was dedicated to this category.

Les ecole des Naskapis in Quebec installed a school data information system. Kanahsatake (Quebec), Saddle Lake (Alberta) and Birch Narrows First Nation in Saskatchewan all used Education Reform funds to upgrade school computer labs.

Beaver Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan invested in a video conferencing system to extend its range of course offerings through distance education. Similarly, the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society's Education: Anytime, Anyplace aims to harness internet-based technology to deliver education programs to British Columbia First Nation communities. British Columbia's Institute of Indigenous Governance plans to extend its innovative application of technologies by collaborating on program development with other Indigenous institutions and increasing its professional

development and research activities.

The Cree School Board in Quebec and the Blood Tribe in Alberta have chosen to invest in teacher training in order to make more effective use of technology in the classroom.

Both the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and the Manitoba Education Resource Centre are developing region wide strategic technology plans. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESEC) in British Columbia is encouraging schools to consider linking with the provincial student information system as a means of improving reporting and monitoring activities.

First Nations in Alberta and Yukon regions lead the way in percentage of regional allocations devoted to technology, both at 18%. Quebec and Saskatchewan used approximately 9% of their allocations (approximately \$300,000 each) for technology-related activities, and Quebec region reported the highest number of initiatives at 12.

## Parental and Community Involvement

Although this category has been identified as one of the priority areas for Education Reform initiatives since its introduction, limited resources have been dedicated to such activity. Nationally, slightly more than \$800,000 (3%) is being invested in 22 projects, with three regions reporting no initiatives in this category (Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan). In 1998-1999, 4% of Education Reform funds were used to introduce strategies aimed at increasing parental and community involvement in First Nation education.

An explanation for the seemingly small amount of resources dedicated to parental and community involvement can be found in the development of the

categories themselves. Several strategies under language and culture programming involved the incorporation of traditional teachings and views of community Elders into the curricula. These types of initiatives may also be considered strategies to enhance community and family attachment to the school.

This is also true of initiatives identified under student achievement and retention. Many of the strategies to improve achievement and retention consider the parent's role to be critical, if not central, to any improvements.

## Professional Development and Training

Initiatives in this category often serve to address at least three of the priority areas identified under Education Reform. Several of the 28 initiatives involving professional development and training seek to improve the instructional approaches and effective uses of information technology in the classroom (improving the quality of classroom instruction). Some education authorities and boards offered workshops and seminars on more effective educational planning and management practices (strengthening management capacity). Other approaches include the delivery of effective parenting workshops and "Introduction to the Internet" sessions for parents and other community members (increasing parental and community involvement in education).

First Nation and Inuit communities in Quebec region lead the way in supporting professional development and training, with 23% of the regional allocation used for such purposes. Nearly \$800,000 supported 14 initiatives in such communities as Kahnawake, Opitciwan and Masheuiatsh. At least eight First Nation schools affiliated with Institut Culturel et

Educatif Montagnais (ICEM) contributed to or participated in training sessions for directors of education, teachers' conferences and professional development opportunities in French language instruction.

Language arts, math/science and special education consultants with the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre delivered teacher workshops to more than 40 First Nation schools around the province during the first half of the 1999-2000 school year.

Several First Nations in Alberta chose to devote a small portion of Education Reform funds to support the development of teacher training studies at Red Crow Community College.

Nationally, \$1.7 million (7%) is being directed towards an array of professional development and training initiatives.

### Student Retention and Achievement

The 84 initiatives underway to improve retention and achievement represent more than 25% of the national total. Slightly more than \$4.6 million (18%) of the national allocation is being invested in a variety of retention and achievement strategies.

More than two-thirds of Yukon region's allocation was used by

First Nations to introduce or extend programs that address chronic absenteeism, limited extracurricular activities for students, school violence and other behavioural problems.

As a result of new secondary curricula implementation in Ontario in 1999-2000, the region applied more than \$1.1 million to the purchase of new instructional materials, including textbooks and graphing calculators for all grade nine students.

Other smaller initiatives supported in Ontario region in this category include the purchase of recreation equipment for smaller schools, youth gatherings to address issues such as gang membership and youth violence (Rainy Lake Ojibway Education Authority), and an ad campaign to expose youth to positive First Nation role models (Woodland Indian Education Centre). In total, Ontario region devoted nearly \$1.5 million (32% of its allocation) to nine initiatives aimed at reducing dropout rates and improving recreational activities available to First Nation youth.

No region (excluding Manitoba's MFNERC) spent less than 13% of its allocation to improve retention and graduation rates.

### Career Development and the School-to-Work Transition

Consistent with Education Reform usage in 1998-1999, First Nations across the country have placed lesser emphasis upon this area. Eighteen projects were supported in this category in 1998-1999, accounting for just 4% of total Education Reform funds. Slightly more than \$840,000 supports 16 career development and school-to-work strategies across the country in 1999-2000. This represents just 3% of Education Reform resources.

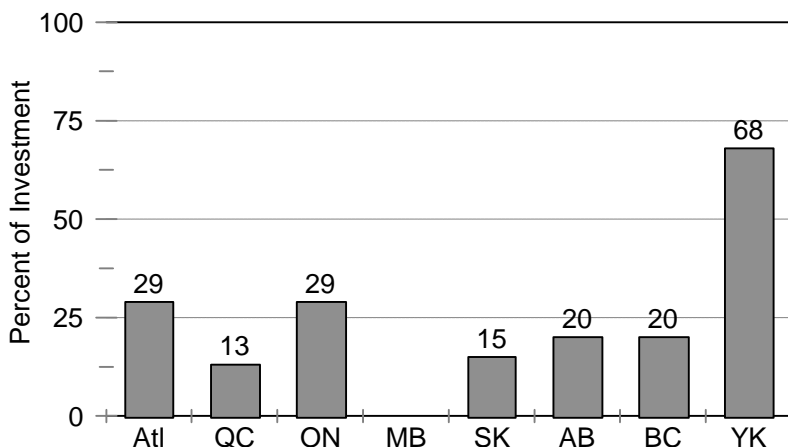
With five initiatives and total spending of \$335,500, Ontario region commits the highest portion of its allocation to these activities (7%). Since 1998-1999, Education Reform funds have been used to support an innovative Stay In School project involving the Toronto Blue Jays Baseball Club, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce,

Tembec Inc. and the Union of Ontario Indians. An annual First Nations Day at SkyDome, leadership and Visions Camps for youth, How To Succeed booklets and videos and a youth career information Web site are among the activities supported.

Increasing demand for co-operative education in First Nation schools in Ontario prompted the region to add \$175,000 of Education Reform dollars to the funds available through the First Nation and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy.

The First Nation and Inuit Youth Employment Strategies - Co-operative Education, Summer Science Camps, Summer Career Placements and the Youth Business and Work Experience programs - provide First Nations and Inuit communities with \$24 million annually for these career development and school-to-work programs.

Student Achievement and Retention



## Building Institutional and Governance Capacity

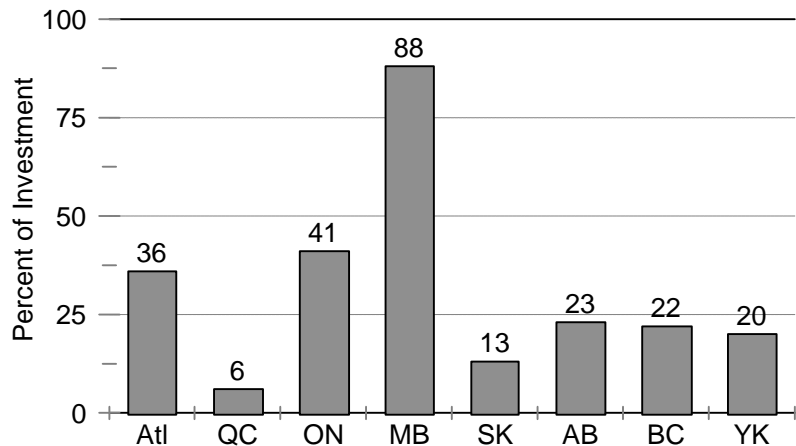
Whether the convening of First Nation education directors to address common concerns, region-wide strategic planning sessions, multi-school evaluations and assessments, program and service development, educational research or dialogue between provincial education ministries and school districts, nearly half of all Education Reform resources over the past two years have been devoted to building institutional and governance capacity in First Nations education.

Regional First Nation organizations are emerging or expanding to serve several communities and schools and are assuming many of the functions fulfilled by school districts, boards and even provincial and territorial Ministries of Education.

The Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey in Nova Scotia, Institut Culturel et Educatif Montagnais and the First Nations Education Council in Quebec, the Grand Council of Treaty 3 in northern Ontario, the eight tribal councils and FSIN in Saskatchewan and other organizations are increasingly viewed by First Nations as an efficient means of delivering a broader range of educational supports and services that would not be normally available to small, often remote, and independently-managed First Nation schools.

Education Reform resources have fostered the expansion of managerial roles for several of these organizations. In 1998-1999, First Nations in Manitoba region used Education Reform support to conduct a province-wide assessment of First Nations education. To address the issues identified in the more than 50 band-operated schools in Manitoba, the resulting report proposed the development of the First Nations Education Resource Centre. In early 1999, the Chiefs of Manitoba dedicated nearly all

Institutional and Governance Capacity



of the region's Education Reform allocation to establishing the centre. Though not yet fully staffed, the centre has begun to offer several services to First Nation schools, including new curriculum implementation, professional development, special education services and resource and reference material services. These services are intended to improve the quality and delivery of education programs and services to First Nation students.

In 1999-2000, more than \$9 million of total Education Reform expenditures (35%) supported these important capacity-building activities.

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### School- and Region-based Initiatives

Initiatives may also be compared in the following classification:

School-based (or, first level) services are programs and services that are part of a school's day-to-day operations and include instructional services (teachers and classroom assistants), administrative support, technology acquisition and maintenance, special education services, curriculum adaptation (i.e., implementation of aboriginal languages/culture

instruction) and breakfast and lunch programs.

School board-type (or, second-level) services are being delivered to groups of schools and include such services as program adaptation, curriculum design, technology and special education support (i.e., subject area specialists, clinicians, psychological services, network technicians), research, school evaluations, transportation, library services and administration. These services are administered by regional (school boards or districts) or provincial-level organizations, such as the Cree and Kativik school boards in Quebec, MFNERC and FNEC.

In 1998-1999, approximately 60% of an available \$10 million was regionally managed. While reporting is not yet complete for 1999-2000, this has increased to approximately 70%.

### Promoting Partnerships, Linkages and Integration

Education Reform is also serving to forge cooperation and collaboration with other organizations, institutions and programs.

Both the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and Tribal Chiefs Ventures of Alberta have joined forces with their respective education

ministries to design Aboriginal language and culture curricula for use in First Nation and provincial schools. A similar arrangement is being considered in Saskatchewan by the FSIN.

Several initiatives in Yukon region have served to foster greater dialogue between First Nation educators and leaders and the Ministry of Education to address low retention and achievement rates.

Namgis First Nation in British Columbia has pooled Education Reform and Income Security Reform resources to deliver adult basic education and career development programs. The language curriculum initiative at Coldwater First Nation in British Columbia has been working with the local Head Start program to ensure the materials being developed can be used in pre-school settings. Another First Nation school in Alberta is sharing staffing costs with the community Head Start program.

In Ontario region, First Nation communities are establishing protocols with local school districts that will allow them more influence in elementary/secondary education delivery.

Entering its fourth year, the Stay In School project involving the Toronto Blue Jays, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Tembec Inc. and other partners continues to be supported in part by Education Reform funds.

Pink Creek First Nation in Manitoba has combined resources with a neighbouring school division to provide professional development training for teachers on new curriculum implementation.

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With nearly three times the resources available in 1999-2000 and more time to consult and plan, First Nations, education organizations and regions made a significant shift in the utilization of funds, from small, independent (single school), temporary projects to long-term strategic initiatives designed to serve First Nation schools, as well as students enrolled in provincial schools.

First Nation educators, administrators and leaders are turning their attention to more collective approaches to

education service delivery, intended to provide a broader range of support and specialized education services to schools that had been operating in relative isolation.

The resources to develop institutional capacity in First Nation schools and school districts have also spawned greater efforts to engage in dialogue with provincial education ministries, boards and districts.

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