

Gathering Strength – Investing in Education Reform Some Community Examples...

Education Reform is an initiative that was launched in 1998 as part of *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. Education Reform resources are used to improve the quality of education and academic achievement in First Nations schools.

Since 1998, investments in Education Reform have totalled \$76 million. How that funding has been used, however, has changed over time. In 2000-2001, \$16.7 million was invested in improving the effectiveness of classroom instruction, where as in 1999-2000 \$7.8 million was allocated. In the same period, funding to strengthen education management and governance increased from \$14 million in 1999-2000 to \$19.7 million in 2000-2001, while support for community and parental involvement decreased from \$3.6 million in 1999-2000 to \$2.1 million in 2000-2001.

In 2000-2001, close to 75 percent of the \$40 million Education Reform budget was managed by First Nations at a regional level. For example, the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), the First Nation Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) in British Columbia and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) distributed funding to First Nations for education.

Special Education

More than 50 initiatives were delivered in 2000-2001 to address special education needs.

In British Columbia, FNEESC and the First Nation School Association (FNSA) implemented the *None Left Behind – Addressing Special Needs Education in First Nation Schools* initiative. Activities included workshops, an information pamphlet and a video highlighting special education issues and challenges in First Nation schools.

FNEESC and FNSA is continuing to work with the University of British Columbia to expand the special needs assessment program. They have increased the services of the toll-free telephone help line to provide assistance to First Nations school personnel dealing with special education issues, needs and programs.

In Alberta, the Samson Cree Nation has introduced a four-part special education initiative which helps their school system to develop and implement remedial programs targeted towards students of all age groups. The project also centralizes all special education needs programming and employs well trained teachers to address the needs of the First Nations students more efficiently. Specific actions include implementing Individual Education Plans, Individual Option Plans for students, and ongoing computer assisted learning programs to support special needs activities.

Language and Culture

During 2000-2001, \$5.2 million of Education Reform resources were dedicated to language and culture initiatives. First Nations in the Quebec and Saskatchewan regions have invested close to \$3 million on similar initiatives.

For example, in the Tootinaowziebeeng Nation in Manitoba, Anishnawbe children learned about oral history and genealogy. The goal was for students to develop a sense of identity, acceptance and sharing through knowledge of their culture.

The Kativik School Board (Quebec) worked to improve students' self-esteem by rediscovering aspects of the Inuit culture that are still useful today. Students connected with the ingenuity and survival skills of the past by building a kayak and qamutik (sleigh) with the support of school staff and community Elders.

Information Technology in Aboriginal Schools

Education Reform funding of \$1.6 million was provided to support the installation, upgrading and maintenance of information technology systems in First Nations schools.

The John D'or Prairie School upgraded their computer hardware and software to help deliver Cree language programming through a state of the art language lab. These improvements, along with an expanded Cree curriculum, is helping to deliver enhanced Cree language-based learning that protects and preserves the culture and language of Little Red River Cree Nation (Alberta).

In Manitoba, the Sapotaweyak Cree Nation provided computer technology in the kindergarten to Grade 8 classrooms of the Neil Dennis Kematch Memorial School, helping students to become familiar with new technologies and helping teachers to enhance and diversify their teaching strategies.

Parental and Community Involvement

Manitoba, Alberta and Québec regions are leading in investing in this type of initiative.

The Interlake Reserves Tribal Council (Manitoba) has continued their home/school coordinators training program to provide enhanced skills to community workers who in turn support parents, school staff and students in achieving their educational goals.

The involvement of parents and the community contributes significantly to other initiatives, such as language and culture and student achievement and retention, by using local resources as the basis for delivering these programs.

Professional Development and Training

Four percent, or \$1.6 million, of Education Reform resources were used for professional development and training initiatives.

In Manitoba, the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council started a two-year training plan in leadership and management. Seminars will be held in negotiating skills, policy development, labour law, financial planning, management and accountability. These seminars will increase the professional capacity of leaders, managers and employees to manage their organization.

Both FNSEC and FNSA continued their skill building activities in British Columbia with a Speakers Series. Seventeen workshops took place throughout the province with more than 250 participants. Teachers, school board members, parents and community workers took part in sessions dealing with special education, support to children, and skills development for school board management.

Student Retention and Achievement

Student retention and achievement initiatives received \$ 5.2 million in Education Reform funding in 2000-2001.

The Yukon Region is the most active in this area; they allocated 62 percent of their available funding to student retention and achievement initiatives. Personal development and attendance issues were dealt with through guidance and counselling services and by reducing risk factors. The Na-cho Nyak Dun First Nation involved Elders in promoting the importance of school and education.

First Nations in the Alberta Region dedicated 39 percent of their resources to this area. Some of their initiatives included supporting greater student achievement, improving classroom instruction by supplying more resources (human and material) to facilitate the learning process of the students.

The Institut Culturel et Éducatif Montagnais (ICEM) in Quebec created a working group to develop new pedagogical resources, define new evaluation strategies and provide class management seminars to help implement the new provincial curriculum.

Tutoring, guidance, extracurricular activities, mentoring, Elders-in-Residence and homework support clubs are examples of initiatives developed in the Atlantic Region. Thirty-five percent of their Education Reform funding went towards student retention and achievement initiatives.

Career Development and the School to Work Transition

Twenty-six initiatives, totalling \$1.5 million of Education Reform resources, supported school to work initiatives in 2000-2001.

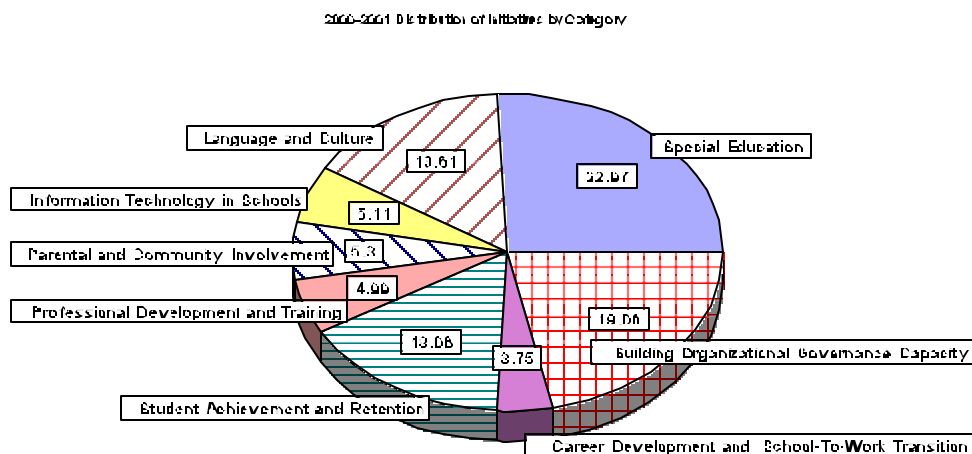
The Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation of Manitoba identified, through its education authority, a group of students to be trained specifically to meet future educational and economic community needs. This initiative has eased the transition from school to work for these students and has helped to appointment of qualified individuals to vital positions in the community. In the long term, programs like this will contribute to the social and economic needs of the community.

Building Institutional Governance and Capacity

In 2000-2001, close to \$7 million was invested in strengthening the governance and capacity in First Nations education.

In Manitoba, funds were allocated to the First Nations Education Resource Centre for its development and operations. The centre offers several services to First Nations schools addressing issues such as professional development, special education services, and access to resource and reference material.

The New Brunswick Aboriginal Education Initiative (involving 10 bands) is developing a comprehensive five-year plan for Aboriginal education. They are establishing school and district monitoring committees and forging greater partnerships with education stakeholders. This strategy sets the foundation to deliver improved programs and services that address the needs of First Nation students in the province.



Inspiring Projects

In an attempt to assist the student population of the Bigstone Cree Nation (Alberta), the community collaborated with Oski Pasikoniwew Cultural and Healing Centre to develop a project that would help Cree youth find a balance between their culture, language and spirituality and the surrounding world. This project included a genealogical program that helped the students to trace their ancestry and learn more about their band. The students also took part in recreational activities such as hunting and canoe trips. Workshops were held by Elders so that they could teach the students more about the band's history. The participation of the Elders in this project was very beneficial because it gave the youth role models, and helped to build rewarding relationships between the youth and the Elders.

Another project involving Cree Elders was launched at the Wiinibekuu School in Waskaganish, Quebec. This project, which fostered the development of Cree culture and language was a great success. Elders demonstrated traditional Cree practices such as concocting and using traditional medicines, stringing snow shoes and making tents. The Elders also acted as special guidance counsellors to the youth and gave them some valuable advice. Through these activities, the project helped both teachers and students become more familiar with their culture and traditions, while improving communication and overall relations between the youth and Elders in this Cree community. After the project finished, the vast majority of the student participants said they greatly appreciated the experience and would like to repeat it.

The goal of the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council's youth initiative in Manitoba is to foster a spirit of motivation among the youth through job placement, summer employment and business development services. These experiences will help prepare young people to establish themselves in the 21st century. Part of the initiative is the Programme 2000 project, which gives 16 youth from the Winnipeg area the opportunity to acquire useful work experience through summer employment. The purpose of this eight-week project is to give participants the opportunity to develop as individuals and, as a result, improve the quality of life within their own communities. Youth gain the opportunity to develop both their communication and teamwork skills.

The Wikwemikong School Board's Skills for Success project (Ontario) was developed to help 19 at-risk Grade 8 students. The four-week program, which took place in July 2001, motivated students to stay in school and become successful at it. The program was made up of two parts: in the mornings core subjects like English and mathematics were covered and in the afternoon students gained practical knowledge that would help them overcome some of life's obstacles. The project enabled the students to catch up on their school work and become better prepared for the following year.