
CMEC UPDATE

JUNE 2005

For more information about the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, visit our Web site at www.cmec.ca.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), composed of the ministers responsible for elementary-secondary and postsecondary education in every province and territory, is the voice of education in Canada and internationally. It serves as the forum in which jurisdictions can discuss education on a pan-Canadian basis and share information and best practices to enhance the quality of education across the country. CMEC also works with the broader education community to ensure that Canada's education systems are among the most innovative in the world.

PRIORITY ACTION PLANS

In follow-up to a review of the mission and mandate of CMEC, ministers decided in September 2004 to place priority emphasis on three aspects of Canadian education in the coming years:

- Aboriginal education
- Literacy
- Postsecondary education capacity

Aboriginal education

Ministers recognize the need to find new and varied ways of working together to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal students in both the elementary-secondary and postsecondary education systems.

Despite many gains in recent years, student dropout rates among Aboriginal young people remain high, and high-school-to-postsecondary transition rates remain low. This situation exists at a time when the number of Aboriginal young people is rapidly increasing, with an expectation that in the next 15 to 20 years, Aboriginal students will represent over 25 per cent of the elementary student population in some provinces and territories. In jurisdictions such as Nunavut, Inuit already constitute 85 per cent of the student population.

Ministers have decided to focus their activities on the following three objectives:

- Objective 1 Identify and share provincial/territorial/federal "best practices" in the elementary-secondary and postsecondary education systems

- Objective 2 Strengthen the capacity for evidence-based decision making through actions that include (a) establishing an approach to encourage Aboriginal students to self-identify, (b) coordinating common data and indicator definitions, and (c) initiating parallel data-collection procedures
- Objective 3 Develop a pan-Canadian framework for action related to teacher training, in collaboration with provincial faculties of education, school boards, ministries/ departments, and professional associations and in consultation with provincial and territorial Aboriginal education organizations to: (a) strengthen and share measures initiated to ensure that training to help new teachers understand the needs of and challenges faced by Aboriginal students is undertaken, (b) establish mechanisms to recruit and train more Aboriginal teachers, and (c) provide ongoing in-service training opportunities to teachers to provide current information and enable them to upgrade their skills

Literacy

Ministers of education are committed to working together to increase the literacy levels of all Canadians and to help Canadians acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world.

While Canadian students tend to perform well on international literacy tests, research has found that performance between Canadian regions and schools varies and that boys perform less well than girls. Other research has found low levels of literacy among adults, with more than two in five lacking the basic literacy skills required for successful participation in the labour market. Groups that face the greatest challenge include at-risk youth, Aboriginal youth, new Canadians, Canadians from isolated regions, and those with learning disabilities.

To address these issues, ministers have set as their objectives two national forums on literacy:

Objective 1 Hold a forum on school-age literacy in Ontario in autumn 2005

Objective 2 Hold a forum on adult literacy in British Columbia in spring 2006

The forums will bring together a broad cross-section of stakeholders to provide the means to better understand the challenges of literacy and help identify strategies to increase literacy significantly. The forum proceedings will provide a valuable source of new information and ideas for the Canadian literacy community.

CMEC will also work with national partners such as Statistics Canada and international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to develop the assessment tools needed to improve literacy in Canada. Joint work with the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), which provides interjurisdictional comparisons of student performance in Canada, is also being considered.

Other possible work includes policy research through the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC) and the involvement of CMEC members in international studies such as the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Postsecondary education capacity

Ministers recognize that Canada's postsecondary education systems face a number of challenges in the broadly defined area of capacity. These include

- the difficulty of recruiting and retaining faculty
- an insufficient number of places in postsecondary institutions to meet demand
- the need for more graduates in specific fields
- an insufficient number of doctoral students to meet institutional needs
- the deterioration of the physical infrastructure of postsecondary institutions because of deferred maintenance
- the heavy toll exacted on institutional and provincial budgets by the indirect costs of research

To address these challenges, three objectives have been identified by CMEC for collective action:

- Objective 1 Survey the state of postsecondary education systems and produce a synoptic document describing postsecondary issues faced by Canada's provinces and territories
- Objective 2 Agree on a joint provincial and territorial position with respect to the federal government and produce a position paper on postsecondary issues; table the position and strategy paper at the Council of the Federation (COF)
- Objective 3 Implement the strategy and ensure appropriate follow-up with the federal government

OTHER INITIATIVES

Ministers also continue to work together in the following areas:

- focusing on education outcomes
- sharing information on best practices
- collaborating on curriculum initiatives
- promoting policy-related research
- strengthening the postsecondary sector and increasing access
- supporting international activities
- promoting mobility

- enhancing CMEC as a forum for effective and fruitful cooperation with the federal government

Most initiatives are conducted on a pan-Canadian basis with all jurisdictions taking part; a small number are based on a consortium model with at least two-thirds of jurisdictions participating.

Current initiatives are outlined below.

Focusing on education outcomes

SAIP and PCAP

Education ministers recognize the importance of setting quantifiable benchmarks in learning. One of the most useful resources in this regard has been the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP). Launched in 1993, it has just completed its third cycle of comprehensive assessments in reading, writing, science, and mathematics. SAIP allows jurisdictions to compare results achieved by 13- and 16-year-olds across Canada. As the SAIP data sets increase in number, so does their utility, because the effects of new curriculum or other school reforms can be determined by comparing student performance that has been tracked over a period of several years.

The third science assessment was administered in 2004 and results were made available in spring 2005. SAIP assessments are supplemented by companion questionnaires completed by principals, teachers, and students, which give greater context for the results by allowing linkages to be made between student achievement and a host of individual, family, and school factors.

In 2007, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) will replace SAIP as the national assessment of learning outcomes in Canada.

The terms of availability of the SAIP data sets are posted on the CMEC Web site. These data sets serve as an excellent quantitative resource for educators interested in further research on education outcomes.

PISA/YITS

Canadian provinces participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international assessment administered under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2003, PISA was administered for a second time to a large sample of 15-year-old students from across the country. The assessment focused mainly on mathematics achievement but also covered reading, science, and problem solving. The PISA report and assessment results were released in December 2004. Canada over-sampled in its PISA data sets so that individual jurisdictions could compare results at both the national and international levels and, in some cases, at the language-group level (English or French). As is the case for SAIP, PISA complements the assessment with questionnaires covering students, families, and schools. A companion study, the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), provides

more detailed demographic information to Canadians . In 2006, science will be the main focus of PISA, but reading and mathematics will also be assessed.

Both the national and international assessments serve as important resources for jurisdictions as they focus on education outcomes in the years ahead.

Sharing information on best practices

OECD activity on e-learning

On June 26–28, 2005, the OECD/Canada/Alberta Conference on E-learning in Post-Secondary Education will be held in Calgary, Alberta. The purpose of the conference is to bring together policy makers from government and public and private higher education institutions to identify and discuss policy opportunities and challenges as they relate to postsecondary e-learning.

Alberta Advanced Education, OECD, Industry Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and Alberta Education are hosting the event.

International networks

Under the auspices of OECD, Norway will assume the coordination of an international network, the aim of which is to support countries seeking to combat school bullying and violence. Provincial and territorial contacts have been named to share information and experiences through this international network.

Another international network is the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network. Provinces and territories involved in varying degrees in ASPnet are Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and British Columbia.

Associated Schools promote UNESCO's ideals by conducting pilot projects to better prepare children and young people to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and interdependent world. ASPnet teachers and students work together to develop innovative educational approaches, methods, and materials from local to global levels. The current objectives for the Canadian ASPnet include fostering networks among schools through the use of new technologies and focusing on schools as centres of social cohesion, peace, culture, and learning.

The CMEC Secretariat provided the initial contact persons in ministries and departments of education to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, which coordinates the activity in Canada. Ministers of education determined that this would not be an activity in which the Secretariat would need to be actively involved.

Collaborating on curriculum initiatives

French-language education in a minority setting

In fall 2000, a consortium of provinces and territories embarked on a project whose ultimate goal is to promote, within francophone schools in minority settings, conditions for learning French as a first language that are conducive to improving school achievement. As part of the project, the consortium undertook an in-depth analysis of the factors that influence the performance of francophone students in minority settings using SAIP data. The consortium also developed a francisation training kit for teachers from kindergarten to grade 2, with a view to helping students acquire the skills necessary to an increased and effective use of French as a language of instruction as well as the sociocultural skills required to use the language as a tool for learning, communication, and self-realization. The teacher training kit was distributed in December 2003, and the Analytical Report of the SAIP data was published in October 2004.

Members of the consortium subsequently agreed to continue joint work in French-language education in minority settings. They approved two projects as part of Phase II of the Pan-Canadian French as a First Language Project (PCFFLP). This new phase has just begun and will see the development of two additional teacher training kits by spring 2007: an oral communication training kit and a kit of teaching tools for reading and writing.

Promoting policy-related research

PCEIP and PCERA

In recent years, a significant portion of CMEC resources has been directed toward increasing awareness among members of the teaching profession and policy makers of the links between education research and policy implementation. Two programs, the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program (PCEIP) and the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (PCERA), conducted in cooperation with Statistics Canada through the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC), have increased the opportunities for educators to foster these links.

In 2000, CMEC and Statistics Canada jointly published *Education Indicators in Canada, 1999*. Another edition was released in 2003, and the next edition will be released in fall 2005. The document offers a comprehensive summary of statistics for all levels of education, compiled through PCEIP, and has been an important resource for educators, policy makers, the media, and the general public.

The work of PCERA aims at supporting policy-relevant research into areas identified as a priority through a process of consultation with ministries and departments of education across Canada. Consultations in fall 2004 brought the list of priority areas up to date; it can be found on the Research and Statistics section of the CMEC Web site. One of the main goals of PCERA is to strengthen the linkages and communication between the consumers of research (policy makers and practitioners) and the researchers. Along with the commissioning of research relating to the priority areas, PCERA focuses on issues of dissemination and utilization of research. PCERA

research has been made available through print and Web-based publications, and research on specific topics has been presented at symposia attended by researchers, senior policy makers, practitioners, and representatives of funding agencies able to further the research work.

In September 2002, CESC entered into a joint initiative with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The CESC–SSHRC Education Research Initiative (CSERI) seeks to promote and support quantitative research in education that uses the SAIP and Statistics Canada educational databases. CSERI continues the work of PCERA, focusing on topics previously identified as priority areas, namely Learning Outcomes and Transitions. Nineteen research projects were awarded funding through the initiative. The first eight will report on their results in spring/summer 2005; the remainder the following year.

Strengthening the postsecondary sector and increasing access

On-line learning

In fall 2002, work began on the Pan-Canadian On-Line Learning Portal to provide one-stop access to on-line learning resources for provincial and territorial stakeholders, educators, and the general public.

Student assistance

CMEC and HRSDC have established a joint committee at the assistant deputy minister level to examine the future of financial assistance to students. The committee provides recommendations and options to a joint federal/provincial/territorial committee of deputy ministers, to ministers responsible for education, and to HRSDC, as required, on potential directions for financial assistance supporting access to postsecondary education.

At the October 2003 CMEC meeting, ministers approved the F/P/T Pan-Canadian Communications Initiative to pursue a national campaign targeting messages and activities to encourage planning of postsecondary education. Officials are currently developing options on shared governance, shared costs, and shared visibility for consideration by the ministers in October 2005.

Designation is the process through which institutions become eligible for government student financial assistance, thereby making students at that institution eligible to apply for it. In October 2004, deputy ministers adopted a pan-Canadian designation policy framework to accomplish two key objectives: taxpayer protection and consumer protection. The framework re-emphasizes the fundamental purpose of government student loan programs — to increase access to postsecondary education.

The pan-Canadian framework is not a designation policy in and of itself, but, rather, a guide for jurisdictions to develop their own designation policies. Jurisdictions are still responsible for developing and implementing their own policies.

Credit transfer

The CMEC Working Group on Credit Transfer has been mandated to identify workable pan-Canadian options and strategies to improve the transferability of university and college credits. At their October 2002 meeting, ministers adopted a *Ministerial Statement on Credit Transfer in Canada*, which is available on the CMEC Web site.

A research agenda identifying three priority areas to provide information to support each jurisdiction's work on transfer has been approved. Jurisdictions will conduct research on the profiles of transfer students, on the costs and benefits of transfer, and on the demand for transfer. Each jurisdiction will choose the timing and focus of its own research work. At the October 2005 ministers' meeting, the Working Group will report on the progress made over the last three years in each jurisdiction.

Adult learning

CONFINTEA VI

Following recommendations that Canada host the North America/Europe regional conference to prepare for the sixth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), a memo was sent to ACDME to determine whether the CMEC Secretariat should begin discussions with federal partners regarding federal interest and funding. Based on the positive response, the CMEC Secretariat will begin discussions with various potential partners.

International Adult Literacy Week

The National Literacy Secretariat has provided funding to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to continue Canadian participation in this UNESCO week. The role of the CMEC Secretariat in this instance is to provide to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO the names of contact persons in provinces and territories. CMEC does not have a further role in coordination or preparation of this work.

Adult learning policy framework and typology

With the support of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), CMEC has undertaken a project on adult education to develop a comprehensive policy framework and common definitions for key terms related to adult learning and to develop typologies to describe the array of learning that occurs. The first phase of this project will be presented to ministers in October 2005.

Quality assurance

In August 2004, ACDME endorsed in principle the establishment of a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance for degree programs. The approach includes the development of (a) a degree

qualifications framework, (b) standards for accreditation/quality assurance reviews, and (c) a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs based on (a) and (b). A working group on quality assurance will oversee this project, including consultations with interested stakeholders, and will report to ACDME in October 2005.

Indirect costs of research

CMEC has begun work on the issue of the appropriate amount governments should be expected to pay for the indirect costs of research at postsecondary education institutions. To that end, CMEC is developing a report on institutional activity regarding federal funding of research. The report will be presented to ministers in October 2005.

Supporting international activities

CMEC continues to be an important participant in activities of international organizations that conduct education-related programs, including APEC, the Commonwealth, OECD, SEAMEO, and UNESCO. CMEC, as the voice of education in Canada abroad, also participates in the education-related activities surrounding the Summit of the Americas. Funding for provincial and territorial participation in international conferences is provided by a grant from Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC).

CMEC maintains an electronic international gateway to education in Canada. The Web site, education@canada (www.educationcanada.cmec.ca), serves as an informative reference point for international students, educators, and government officials who are interested in the education systems in Canada.

CMEC coordinates visits of education delegations to Canada and, in collaboration with FAC, provides support in this area to ministries and departments of education.

CMEC's priorities in international forums are governed by the education ministers' domestic agenda and therefore reflect the priorities established by provinces and territories. The work is also guided by the Federal-Provincial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities (FPCCERIA).

Two jurisdictions are cooperating in monitoring, for CMEC, developments relating to the World Trade Organization and the General Agreement on Trade in Services.

CMEC coordinates Canadian involvement in projects of the OECD Indicators of Education Systems (INES), which produces the publications *Education at a Glance* and *Education Policy Analysis* annually.

Through the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), CMEC provides information and referral services for credential evaluations as well as information about postsecondary education in Canada, specific professions and trades, second-language instruction

in Canada, postsecondary education abroad, exchange and financial aid programs, and international mobility in higher education. CICIC participates in meetings of the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region and keeps abreast of international quality assurance, crossborder, and transnational education issues. More information about CICIC can be found at www.cicic.ca.

Promoting mobility

Teacher mobility

The CMEC Agreement in Principle on Teacher Mobility, concluded in response to the 1994 Agreement on Internal Trade, is being implemented. Registrars are cooperating on a pan-Canadian basis to reconcile differences in requirements for teacher certification among jurisdictions. The registrars are also addressing issues of common concern such as prior learning, assessment, and recognition (PLAR) and the suspension or cancellation of teaching certificates. They are now considering the implications of sharing information relating to teacher disciplinary records both within and between provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

Student Transfer Guide

Every year, thousands of Canadian secondary school students transfer from one province/territory and school system to another. Student mobility is being addressed by CMEC through the *Student Transfer Guide*. This document, currently available in its 8th edition (2001) on CMEC's Web site assists principals and teachers as well as students themselves in determining appropriate placement and courses in their new schools so that their studies can be as continuous as possible, without gaps or duplications. It is expected that the 9th edition will be available in 2005.

Enhancing CMEC as a forum for effective and fruitful cooperation with the federal government

Official languages

A major area of longstanding cooperation between CMEC and the federal government is the official languages in education. Acting on behalf of the provinces and territories, CMEC negotiates an umbrella agreement, or protocol for bilateral agreements, with the Department of Canadian Heritage. Under the bilateral agreements, approximately \$182 million is transferred to the provinces and territories annually to assist them in the costs of offering minority-language education and second-language instruction.

The protocol also provides for two national programs that are coordinated by CMEC — Explore/Destination Clic and Accent/Odyssey, formerly called the Summer Language Bursary Program

and the Official-Language Monitor Program respectively. These programs have given over 250,000 students from across Canada the opportunity to learn Canada's two official languages. The current protocol and bilateral agreements expired on March 31, 2003, and were extended pending conclusion of a new protocol. CMEC and Canadian Heritage are continuing their negotiations.

Copyright law

The use of digital resources in education is increasing. In October 2002, the federal government tabled a report that provides an approach and timetable for managing copyright reform. Education and access issues are among the priorities for reform, according to the report, and legislation in this area will affect how students and educators can use digital resources in the future and at what cost. Members of the CMEC Copyright Consortium support the government's intent to bring Canada's copyright law into the digital age. In this regard, one of the consortium's key recommendations to the government is the need for an exception in the act for the educational use of the Internet.

Future directions

CMEC also cooperates with the federal government under PISA, as well as in education-related international activities. In all relations with the federal government, CMEC is cognizant of the historic role of the provinces and territories in delivering education, as well as the jurisdictional responsibilities outlined in the Canadian constitution. Future directions for CMEC will certainly continue to reflect this fact, while recognizing that the federal government can play a positive role in the enhancement of education in Canada.