

# First Nations Adult Secondary Education Research Project

This research was conducted and the data were analysed for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) by Jean Cockell and Marg Penney, independent consultants.

The project conclusions and recommendations were formulated in conjunction with Barb Kavanagh, Director of Research and First Nations Schools.

May, 2002



**first nations education  
steering committee**

## Executive Summary and Recommendations

This research project was initiated to investigate issues associated with First Nations adult secondary education. The project findings are intended to contribute to ongoing policy discussions of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). The project primarily involved the implementation of a detailed survey designed to collect specific data about the existing First Nations controlled adult secondary education programs in BC.

The adult secondary education programs described in this report are funded predominantly by DIA through a nominal roll system. To be eligible for federal funding, the students enrolled in the programs must be working toward a provincial Regular Dogwood or Adult Dogwood diploma.

The study results demonstrate that the students enrolled in First Nations adult secondary education programs vary tremendously. Approximately 37 percent of the students enrolled were male, and 63 percent were female. The students' ages generally ranged from 18 to over 45, although a few programs reported enrolling students who are 17 and even, occasionally, at 15. The majority of the students enrolled were below 29 years of age. Before enrolling in the programs, the students had previously been out of school for anywhere from 1 to well over 10 years, with 40 percent out of school from between 1 and 5 years. The highest grade level previously attained by the students ranged from grade 12 to less than grade 8, with the great majority of students (74 percent) having completed grade 10 or less.

One finding of this study relates to the limited funding provided for adult secondary education programs. That limited funding is quite problematic, particularly given the stated goals of the adult education programs, which generally involve ensuring flexibility to meet a tremendous range of student needs and expectations. The adult secondary education programs surveyed aim to provide students with a range of skills, attitudes, values, and opportunities for personal growth that will allow students to achieve success in their lives -- however success might be defined for each individual.

The goal of meeting a range of student needs is quite challenging given the diversity of the students enrolled in the programs. Assessments demonstrate that the students, when enrolling in the programs, are at quite different English and math skill levels. Almost half of the students entered the programs with assessed English skills at Grade 8 or below. That figure was 60 percent for math skills. The students generally have a variety of goals when entering the adult programs, including entrance to a post-secondary institute or a training program, gaining specific skills for employment, for general assistance in attaining employment, and for personal development. There are also numerous barriers to First Nations adult students returning to school, including family responsibilities, employment responsibilities, personal development needs, a lack of finances, and a lack of self-confidence.

In spite of these challenges, it appears that students are achieving success through First Nations adult secondary education programs. The data gathered through this survey demonstrate that

most students are increasing their English and math skills at a rate of one to two grade levels per year. Although limited data is available in this area, the survey responses also suggest that a number of students leaving the adult secondary education programs have achieved their goals.

Several issues highlighted for particular attention in further investigations and in policy discussions are outlined in detail later in this report, and are outlined briefly below.

## **Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration**

### **Policy Development**

- A unanimous finding from the research workshop participants relates to the inadequacy of current funding levels for adult education programs. Funding levels provided for adult secondary education programs should be carefully reviewed and evaluated in terms of their adequacy, with particular attention to operations and maintenance needs.
- Current funding levels should be adjusted to make it possible for programs to address the need for culturally relevant curricula. In the meantime, many of the project participants suggested the usefulness of Open Learning Agency (OLA) materials. Therefore, OLA materials should be accepted for funding purposes.
- It is important that program structures and program funding requirements be flexible, including greater flexibility in terms of nominal roll counts.
- It must be recognized that the goals of students enrolled in adult secondary education programs vary significantly. Program structures and funding requirements should reflect that reality, particularly in terms of adjusting the requirement of a Dogwood Diploma as a goal for all students enrolled.
- Many of the students enrolled in First Nations controlled adult education programs are working at a fundamental or literacy level. That fact must be taken into consideration in terms of the requirement of 8 courses for a full-time FTE. The current counting of literacy courses in terms of FTEs is problematic.
- The characteristics and varied responsibilities of many adult learners make it difficult for them to take eight courses the current requirements for a full time equivalent (FTE) student. The requirements should therefore be changed to lower the FTE course requirements for adult students.

### **Research**

- There is a lack of culturally relevant assessment tools. This need should be addressed through efforts to identify whether assessment tools not considered through this research

exist and, if so, whether those tools are more culturally relevant. Future research could also include the development of culturally relevant assessment tools.

- Research should be undertaken to determine what facilitates the enrollment and successful completion of secondary education programs by First Nations adults.

## Information Sharing

- There is a need for better information sharing to ensure that the programs adequately prepare for program reviews. It would be useful to offer program representatives direct assistance in this regard.
- It is important to celebrate the success of the First Nations controlled adult secondary education programs. The programs are striving to provide flexible, supportive, safe environments that adapt to student needs. The programs are also contributing to community needs. The students enrolled in the programs are also showing significant progress, generally increasing one or more grade levels per year.

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary and Recommendations	
Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration	
-Policy Development	
-Research	
-Information Sharing	
Table of Contents	1
Project Background and Objectives of the Study	2
Project Methodology	3
-Phase One	3
-Phase Two	3
Project Findings	6
-Description of the Programs and Students	6
-Program Funding and Partnerships	12
-Program Goals	12
-Student Assessment	14
-Curriculum	21
-Measures of Success	22
-Barriers	30
-Other Comments	33
-Summary	35
Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration	36
-Policy Development	36
-Research	37
-Information Sharing	37
Appendix One First Nations Adult Secondary Research Project Original Terms of Reference....	38
Appendix Two Project Survey	41

## Project Background and Objectives of the Study

This project was sponsored by the FNEESC to gather detailed information about the First Nations controlled adult secondary education programs that are operated in BC. The information collected through the research is intended to inform ongoing discussions with the DIA regarding its policy for and funding of adult education. The project specifically aimed to provide a better understanding of the types of programs being offered and their students, including their general ages, backgrounds, and reasons for being enrolled. The project also explored the success of the First Nations controlled adult education program and the progress of the students enrolled.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) sponsored this research project to investigate issues associated with First Nations adult secondary education programs in British Columbia. This project represents the second phase of this research initiative. In 1998/1999, the project was launched with a workshop for representatives of First Nations adult secondary programs. That workshop allowed for their input into the project design, as well as for their contribution of qualitative information. Following that workshop, the project survey was developed with assistance from staff of Statistics Canada. That survey was then tested through a pilot study. Based upon the findings of that research, the survey instrument was finalized and the second phase of the project was undertaken in 2001/2002. Both the pilot and the second phase of this study were based on the Terms of Reference included in Appendix One, which were written in 1997.

This research was conducted and the data was analysed for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) by Jean Cockell and Marg Penney, independent consultants. The project conclusions and recommendations were formulated in conjunction with Barb Kavanagh, Director of Research and First Nations Schools, FNEESC. The project was funded by DIA.

# Project Methodology

This final report highlights the findings of Phase One and Phase Two of the Adult Education Research Project.

## *Phase One*

As described above, phase one of this project involved two components:

- a workshop involving representatives of First Nations adult secondary education programs in BC, to facilitate their input into the design of the research process and into the subject matter of the project; and
- the creation and distribution of an adult secondary education survey to collect data about existing adult education programs.

The survey included questions designed to gather a combination of qualitative and quantitative information and was divided into two parts. Part 1 of the survey asked instructors/administrators to provide general information about the program, e.g., goals, curriculum used, assessment strategies, etc. Part 2 asked the respondents to provide detailed information about a particular cohort of students – those enrolled in their First Nations adult secondary education program between July 1997 and June 1998. Specific data related to those students was collected in order to provide a clearer understanding of the general characteristics of program participants.

In Phase One, seven surveys were returned with information on 160 students in total. The survey results were analyzed by FNEESC research staff and the findings of the survey, with the additional information provided at the workshop, were reported in the document *Adult Secondary Education Research Project: Preliminary Findings of Questionnaire Research*, January, 2000.

## *Phase Two*

### **Start-up**

Due to the low response rate in Phase One, FNEESC decided to consider it a pilot project of the survey instrument and to slightly revise the survey instrument and hire independent researchers to conduct Phase Two. The researchers made minor revisions to the First Phase survey and drafted a cover letter for the Second Phase survey. The survey changes included re-formatting and re-wording to make the survey easier to use and clearer. FNEESC also hoped that hiring two contractors to focus specifically on assisting potential respondents would result in an increased response to the survey.



As in Phase One, the Phase Two survey gathered information about a particular cohort of students - those enrolled in First Nations adult secondary programs between July 1999 and June 2000. The definition of adult secondary programs included programs from basic literacy up to the Grade 12 level. Only students funded through the nominal roll process were to be included in the cohort data. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix Two.

Phase Two of the project began in May 2001, when the researchers met with the FNEESC representative who provided background to and objectives of the project. The FNEESC representative indicated that getting completed surveys returned was the key objective for the project researchers.

One of the researchers met with the FNEESC representative and the Adult Education Subcommittee on June 12, 2001. The subcommittee reviewed and approved the project work plan, the cover letter, and the survey revisions.

## Contacts and Contact Lists

FNEESC provided two different lists of First Nations Adult Programs obtained from the DIA, one for the year 2001/02 and one for 2000/01. The researchers created a single list and added contact names to this list, based on their extensive work with people in the field during the Adult First Nations Students with Special Needs Project.<sup>1</sup> They developed a protocol for the initial telephone contacts, reviewed it with the FNEESC representative, and made three test telephone calls. The protocol was adjusted accordingly. The researchers divided the list of contacts and made calls to all those on the list, with the exception of one location which had no telephone.

The list started off with thirty-eight schools, but was amended based upon the initial contact calls. These amendments included changes to schools, contact names, phone numbers, fax numbers, and addresses. Schools that did not have adult secondary students who were funded through the nominal roll process of DIA between July 1999 and June 2000 were removed from the list. Schools were added that did have students in this category. As of June 26, 2001 there were thirty-two schools on the list. The researchers had FNEESC staff send out surveys by fax or mail to thirty-one schools. Four of those 31 schools were sent surveys even though the researchers were unable to reach them by telephone. The 32<sup>nd</sup> school was contacted in August and was found to have no students in the target group. Therefore, it was removed from the list, leaving 31 schools/programs for inclusion in the study. The researchers made some follow-up calls in July, some at the end of August and the rest in September. The researchers had FNEESC staff send further faxes to those who needed a new copy of the survey instrument.

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<sup>1</sup> FNEESC sponsored a research project in 2000 to examine issues associated with adult students with special needs. Jean Cockell and Marg Penney completed that project on behalf of FNEESC.

After several contact calls, 3 of the 31 schools were taken off the list due to no contact (no phone or no answer), and 1 was left on but marked for no further contact because the respondent indicated the adult program teacher had left and that it was not possible to access the files, leaving 27 schools on the active contact list as of September 30, 2001.

## Completed Surveys

One survey was received in July. Three more were received by the end of September. In the September follow-up calls, many program representatives indicated that they should be able to complete and return the surveys by early October. Up to the end of November, the researchers continued to make reminder calls to the people who had indicated that they would complete the survey. One of the researchers visited one of the programs to help with the survey completion.

The researchers met with the FNEESC representative at the end of October to review the project progress. At that time, the objectives for the project consultants were expanded to include both qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the survey results and drafting of the final report.

By the end of December, seventeen surveys had been returned, fourteen of which were complete, with two programs returning Part 1 only and one program returning Part 2 only. One of these responses also included individual responses from five instructors on the detailed questions related to assessment, curriculum and barriers to access. The survey results were analyzed by the independent researchers and reviewed by the FNEESC representative in February 2002.

Adult Programs that submitted completed surveys were:

- Hartley Bay Elem./Sec. School
- Ya Thuy Thut Training Program
- Heiltsuk College/Waglisla Integrated Studies Centre (including multiple responses on selected questions from instructors)
- Ted Williams Memorial Learning Centre
- Switsemalph Learning Centre
- Stoney Creek Learning Centre
- Gingolx Adult learning Centre
- Chemainus Native College/Stu ate Lelum Secondary School
- Musqueam Adult learning Centre
- Sxoxomic Community Band School
- Lach Klan School
- Aatse Davie School
- Gitwangak Adult School
- Lax Kw Alaams Community School
- George Manuel Institute (Part 1 only)
- Jean Marie Joseph Adult Centre (Part 1 only)
- Nuxalk College (Part 2 only)

# Project Findings

## *Description of the Programs and Students*

The focus of this study was First Nations Adult Secondary Education Programs that are funded through the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) nominal roll process. In order to be eligible for that funding, the programs must be based on the Ministry of Education graduation requirements, and all students enrolled in the program must be pursuing a Secondary School Graduation Diploma<sup>2</sup>. The instructions to the Phase Two survey emphasized that enrollment in adult secondary programs included programs from basic literacy up to the grade 12 level.

The responding schools/programs answered the question regarding a description of the structure of their adult secondary program in a variety of ways, including mention of some and/or all of the following: program purpose (diplomas, employment skills, prerequisites), levels served, and mode of delivery.

Generally, the programs surveyed were set up so that students were offered programs of study leading to secondary school completion through an Adult Dogwood, Regular Dogwood, or GED. As well, students work to gain skills needed for employment and prerequisites for post-secondary programs.

Respondents indicated that students enrolled at many different levels in order to reach their long-term goals. For the programs that indicated these varying levels, some reported many students started at literacy levels and many were at different levels/grades in particular subject areas depending on their skills in those areas.

Eight (50%) of the responding schools/programs who provided information on this question reported that they used self-paced programming of some sort (computer assisted, tutorial, correspondence). Two responding schools mentioned that they used instructor directed methods, and one school reported use of a variety of methods.

The 16 schools/programs responding to Part 1 of the survey have been in existence for varying lengths of time: 6 (37.5%) for more than 10 years (one of these for more than 25 years), 6 (37.5%) for 6 to 10 years, and 4 (25%) for 3 to 5 years. The programs included in the survey results enroll students of wide ranging ages; 8 (50%) reported 19 years and over and 5 (31.25%)

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that, due to cuts by DIA, many communities have been unable to access funding for adult secondary education programs. As a result, those communities are forced to use creative funding alternatives to operate their much-needed programs. However, doing so in many cases requires using funding that is crucial for other program areas, such as post-secondary education and training.

reported 18 years and older. One program had age levels beginning at 17, one at 15, and the other reported grade rather than age levels (7 to 12).

For the purpose of several questions involved in this study, survey respondents were asked to describe the students of a one-year cohort – those enrolled in the programs from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000, including ongoing and new students enrolled at that time.

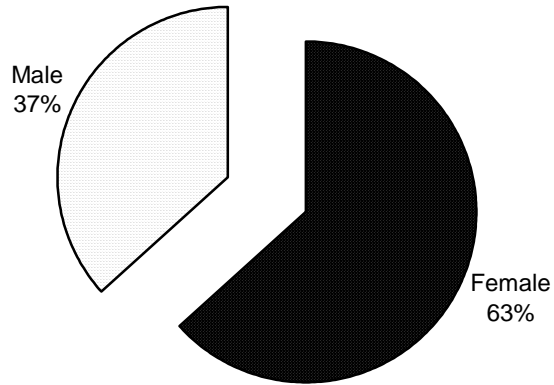
As can be seen from the charts on the following pages:

- almost 2/3 of the students in this cohort were female
- half of them had been in the program for 1 year, a further 23% for 2 years, 16% for 3 years, and 11% for 4 years or more
- 60% were 29 years of age or younger, with 16% being 40 years and older
- 40% had been out of school for 5 years or less, while 14% had been out of school 20 years or more
- only 7% were known to have attended residential school
- for 81%, the last school attended was a public school
- for 47%, the highest grade previously completed was Grade 9 or less, with 30% having completed Grade 10, 18% having completed Grade 11, and 5% having completed Grade 12<sup>3</sup>

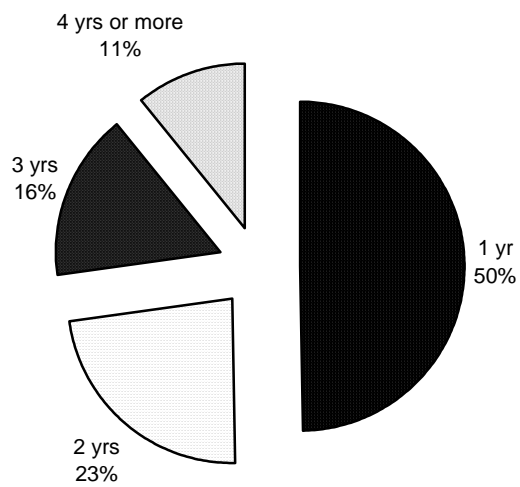
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<sup>3</sup> These figures differ slightly from statistics for the provincial education system. A K-12 Adult Learner Outcomes Survey was conducted by the BC Ministry of Education in 1999. That effort collected data from 1,493 former adult learners who had completed or almost completed their program of study. That survey demonstrated that 74% of the students in the public system were 25 years old or younger. 46% of the students had been out of school for 5 years or less. The respondents had left their previous schooling in: grade 9 or under, 9%; grade 10, 11%; grade 11, 21%; and grade 12, 58%.

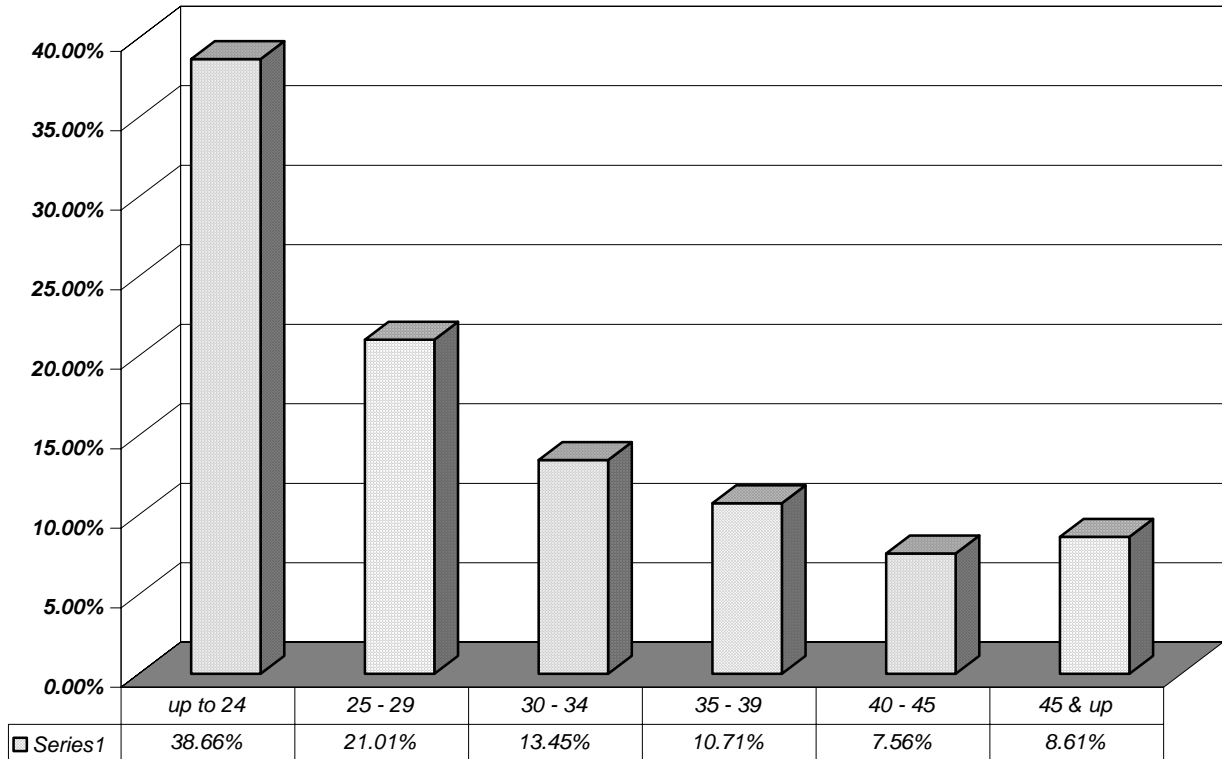
## Male/Female Distribution



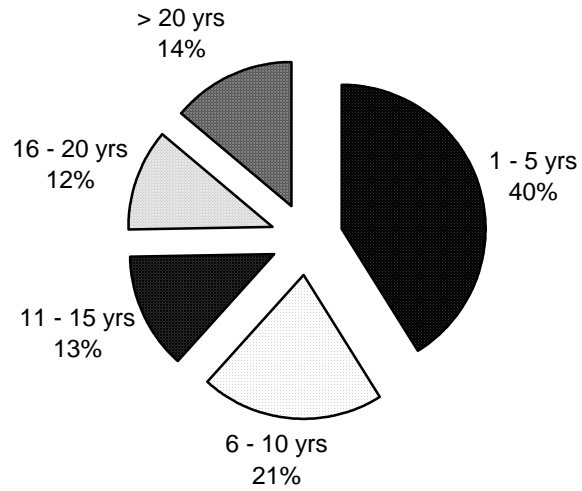
## No. of Years in Program



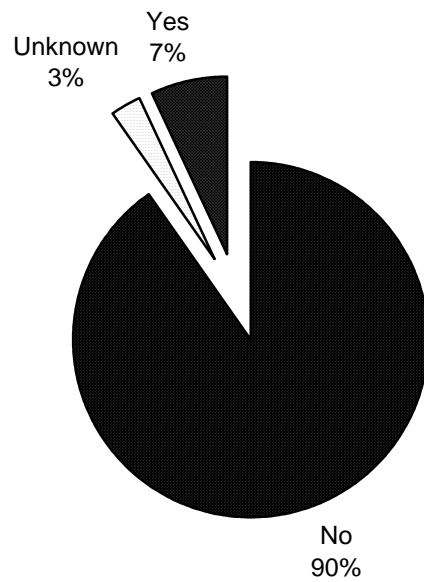
## Student Age



## No. of Years Out of School



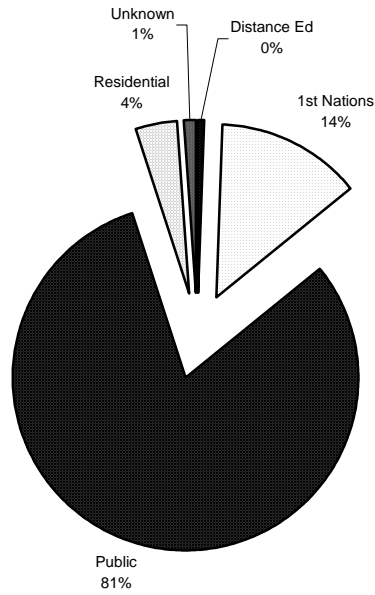
## Attended Residential School?



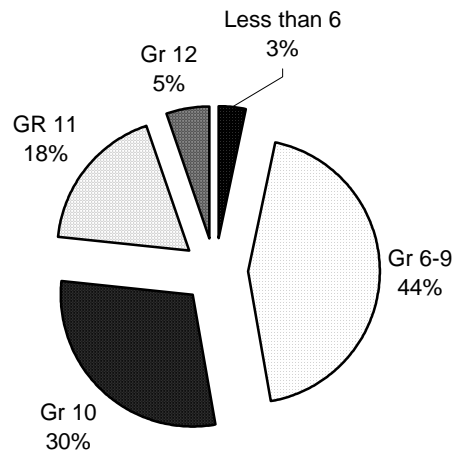




## Previous School Type



## Highest Grade Level Completed



## *Program Funding and Partnerships*

Of the sixteen schools/programs responding to Part 1 of the survey, all but two (87.5%) reported that their programs are Band-controlled. Of these responding programs, ten (62.5%) reported that they run in partnership with another organization. All of these are partnered with their local school district except one, which partners with the Open Learning Agency (OLA).

As noted above, the focus of this study was adult secondary education programs funded by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) through the nominal roll system, and for the programs responding to the survey, that is the foundation of their funding. Three of the responding schools/programs used proposals to obtain additional funding. One of these indicated that their funding is inadequate due to a Band cap that their enrollment exceeds, so,

- We get small grants from FNEESC/FNSA and this helps tremendously.

One responding school indicated that, as well as nominal roll funds, their school ran outside-funded training programs. Another reported that they received joint funding from Band education and Band economic development with different criteria from both funding sources. All of the workshop participants also commented on the inadequacy of funding levels, and the challenges related to combining funding from various sources, often requiring extensive proposal and report writing.

## *Program Goals*

The survey respondents were asked to describe the mission and/or goals of their programs. As noted above, the programs surveyed are set up so that students are offered programs of study leading to secondary school completion.

- The official goal of the program is to encourage adults in the community to complete their BC Secondary Graduation requirements (Dogwood).

As well as this official goal, respondents stated other goals which clustered around the following themes:

- learning environment
- student needs
- community needs

Of the sixteen schools/programs responding to the survey, nine (56%) stated the importance of creating an environment conducive to learning. These respondents used words to describe this

environment, such as safe, supportive, caring and comfortable. One instructor commented:

- I see it as a goal of the program to encourage the adult population to feel at home within a learning environment, even those who have had negative experiences in school in the past.

Another said:

- within a safe, caring, supportive environment.

Some respondents indicated that this environment is created by using First Nations culturally relevant materials and learning perspectives/strategies.

- uses First Nations culture and perspectives as a basis for personal/academic progress.
- Our mission is to create and sustain a learning environment which is conducive to Native learning; an environment that must be sensitive to Native history, culture, and tradition, and must provide relevant and high quality academic programs and training.

Some respondents indicated the learning environment is influenced by the structures in place.

- to provide an alternative, safe environment which encourages independent learning through self-pacing
- to provide a quiet atmosphere which yields focussed learners.

Of the 16 schools/programs responding to the survey, 10 (62.5%) stated the goal of responding to individual student needs. These needs are described as holistic and range from basic literacy to prerequisites for post-secondary programs and/or employment skills and/or personal life skills.

- will help students by developing holistic educational programs that meet the needs of students; academically, emotionally, socially, physically and culturally.

The official goal (Adult Secondary School completion or Dogwood) may or not be one of those needs.

- Unofficially, I see one of the primary goals of the program is to serve as a repository of information and a way to access the world of knowledge, for practical, recreational, or any other reason, regardless of whether an individual intends to complete a formal program of studies leading to a Dogwood.

One school's belief statements/guiding principles are not only student focused but also developed and amended by students.

- We believe that:
  - The focus must be on the needs of the students.
  - Every individual needs a sense of self-worth.
  - Learning is a life-long continuous process and we are a community of learners.
  - Individuals must develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make wise choices about themselves and their environment.
  - All students want to learn and opportunities must be provided for them to attain and experience personal success.
  - Effective learning takes place in an atmosphere of personal relevance and enthusiasm.
  - Everyone must take responsibility for becoming a self-directed learner.
  - All individuals must develop skills and attitudes to successfully manage change.
  - Strength is built through cooperation and collaboration and the contribution of everyone is valued.

Of the sixteen schools/programs responding to the survey, seven (43.75%) stated the goal of responding to community needs. The following are samples from respondent goal statements that illustrate the focus on community needs:

- graduates of our programs will be prepared to make valued contributions to their work, to their communities and to greater society.
- help students blossom into healthy, responsible members of the community.
- to increase the literacy level within the community. The educational level, especially of the male members, is very low.
- to develop curriculum training in keeping with needs and direction of community.
- highlight adult learners' special position as role models in their community and families.
- the mission of the college, in partnership with its community

The goals of the First Nations adult secondary education programs emphasize creating a supportive learning environment, responding to individual learner needs, and meeting community needs. As well as the official goal of secondary graduation, this includes focusing on academic skills, employability skills, and community/life skills. Given the tremendous range in the ages, experiences, and backgrounds of the students enrolled in the programs, as described above, it is not surprising that so many of the programs focus on the need for flexibility, and addressing the unique situation of each adult learner.

## *Student Assessment*

(Note: One program submitted an overall response to initial questions on the survey, but also included individual responses from five instructors on the detailed questions related to assessment, curriculum, and barriers to access. Therefore, on these later questions the total number of responses by individual instructors could be as high as 20 for questions answered by all respondents.)

### **Assessment Tools**

Of the sixteen schools/programs responding to the survey, all but two (87.5%) reported assessing students at entry to determine skill levels, and the two that didn't use an assessment test per se did note the use of a personal interview. The various assessment tools were rated as show in Table 1:

Table 1: Usage, Accuracy, and Ease of Use of Assessment Tools

<i>Assessment Tool</i>	<i>Programs Using</i>	<i>Accuracy in Identifying Skill Level (Average Rating)</i> <i>(Scale: 1= Excellent to 4= Poor)</i>	<i>Ease of Use (Average Rating)</i> <i>(Scale: 1= Very Easy to 4=Difficult)</i>
CAAT	62.5%	2.33	1.67
Gates-McGinnity	18.8 %	2.0	2.0
Brigance Inventory	0%	NA	NA
Personal Interview	100%	1.72	1.28

The Canadian Academic Achievement Test (CAAT) was used by ten of the sixteen programs (62.5%), but its average rating was only 2.33, between Good and Fair, in terms of its ability to identify skill levels of students. Its average rating on ease of use was 1.67, between Very easy and Easy enough. Two instructors felt that the CAAT placed students at a too high a level:

- We find the CAAT gives a higher reading comprehension result than many of our students actually have. We are looking into ordering different tests from PSYCAN
- For CAAT scores do not reflect adult students' ability. In some cases, the student scores high; however, the adult student is missing basic skills (i.e. writing skills, etc.)

All programs used the personal interview, and its average rating on accuracy of placement was 1.72 (between Excellent and Good). Its average rating on ease of use was 1.28 (between Very easy and Easy enough).

Other approaches to assessment included the following:

- Three instructors at one program mentioned using OLA assessments, with an average rating of 2 (Good) on accuracy of placement, and an average rating of 1.5 (between Easy and Easy enough) on ease of use
- Two instructors used the TABE
- Two instructors said they used a writing sample and one a numeracy assignment
- Assessment tools used by one program only included CAT II, Stanford, locally developed English and Math Literacy assessments, GED assessments, EMAT, and SOI, the last for students with special needs

General comments on the topic of assessment by program personnel were varied:

- Culturally relevance is a concern as is locally relevant & [the] urban/rural focus issue.
- A really good assessment tool is hard to find! If you find the perfect one hold on to it.
- Some assessment tools discourage the adult learners as they begin or move quickly to a more difficult level

In contrast to those who felt that tests placed students at too high a level, and led to failure, the following respondent takes the opposite view:

- During the 1998-1999 school year assessment tests typically indicated that students were at lower academic levels than their transcripts indicated (e.g., assessment test indicated a grade 8 level in English while the transcript indicated completion of grade 10 English). Students were placed on the basis of these assessment tests. As a consequence of this, many potential students were discouraged and subsequently did not return to take up these courses and study; in the words of the instructor they were scared off. When I started my judgment was that these poor tests results were not a fair indication of student ability but simply a consequence of doing the tests without prior review, after, in some cases, many years away from school

I adopted the policy of starting students off where their transcripts indicated they had stopped... I made a deliberate decision to err on the side of a more advanced level, accepting the potential for failure. My thinking is that people do indeed rise to the level of expectations and that, in the event a student does fail, it is preferable to fail trying to do something beyond him/her than to fail by giving up due to discouragement at being in a place they thought they had left long ago. I believe that this policy does work (and certainly better than the alternative of following assessment results); the boost to self-esteem is worth the pains and risk of failure it might entail.

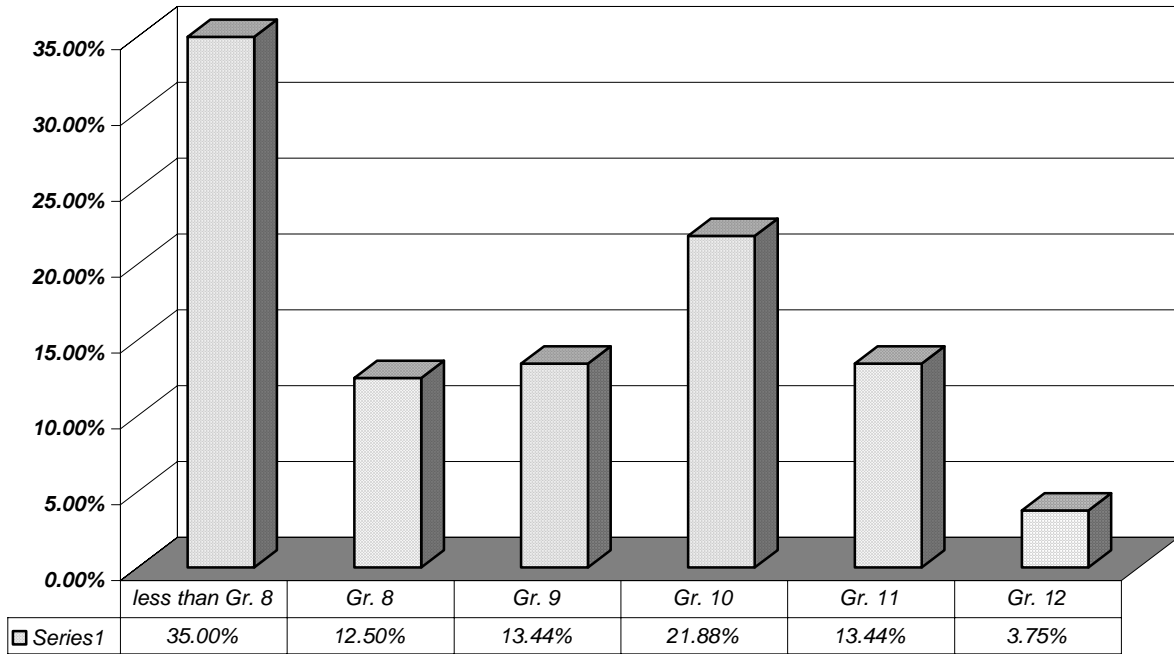
## Assessment Results

Results from initial assessments in English and math, as well as differences between highest grade previously completed and entry level English and math scores, are depicted in charts on the following pages. Highlights of these results show that:

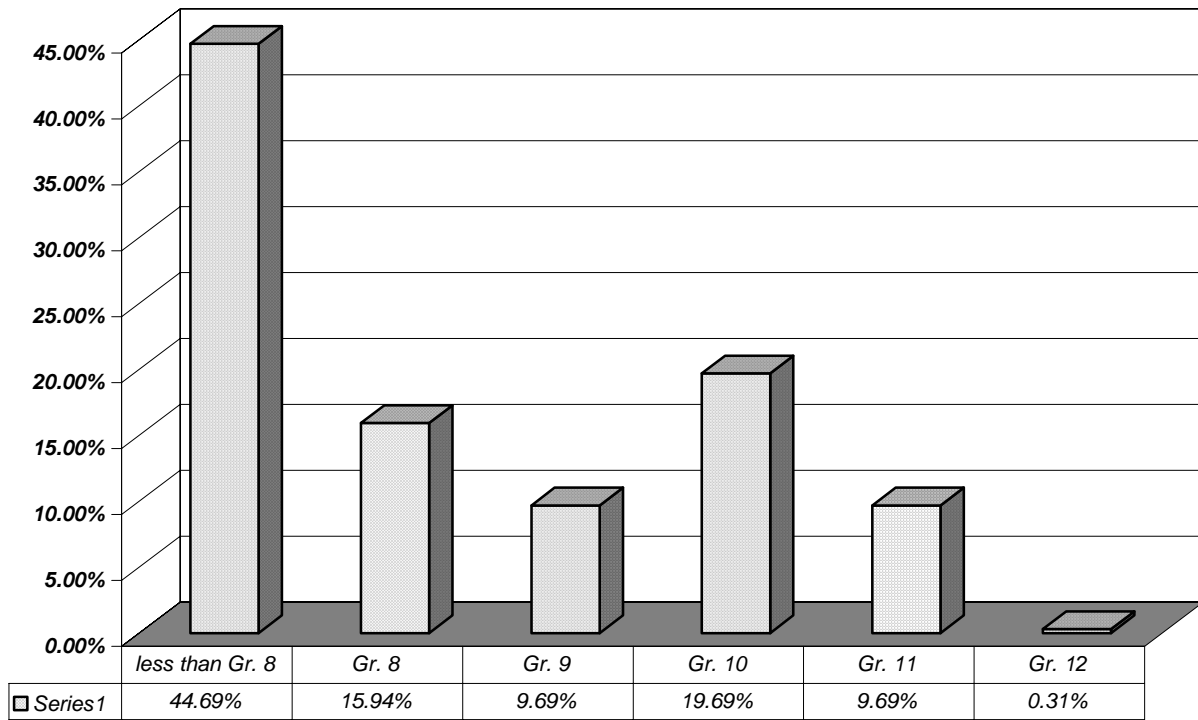


- almost half the students enter programs with assessed English skills at the Grade 8 level or below
- 60% of the students enter programs with assessed math skills at the Grade 8 level or below
- 27.8% of the students enter at an English level matching their last year completed in school, but just over half show losses of 1 to 3 grade levels
- 23.47% of the students enter at a math level matching their last year completed in school, but 64% show losses of 1 to 3 grade levels

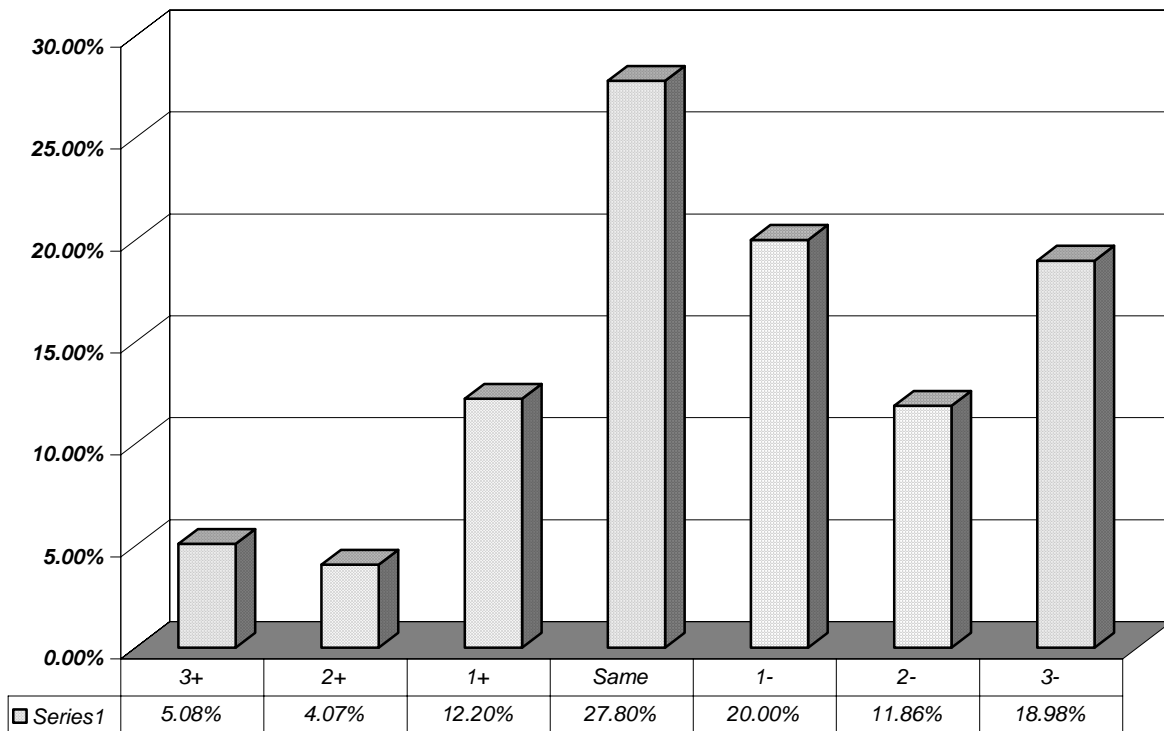
## English Proficiency At Enrolment



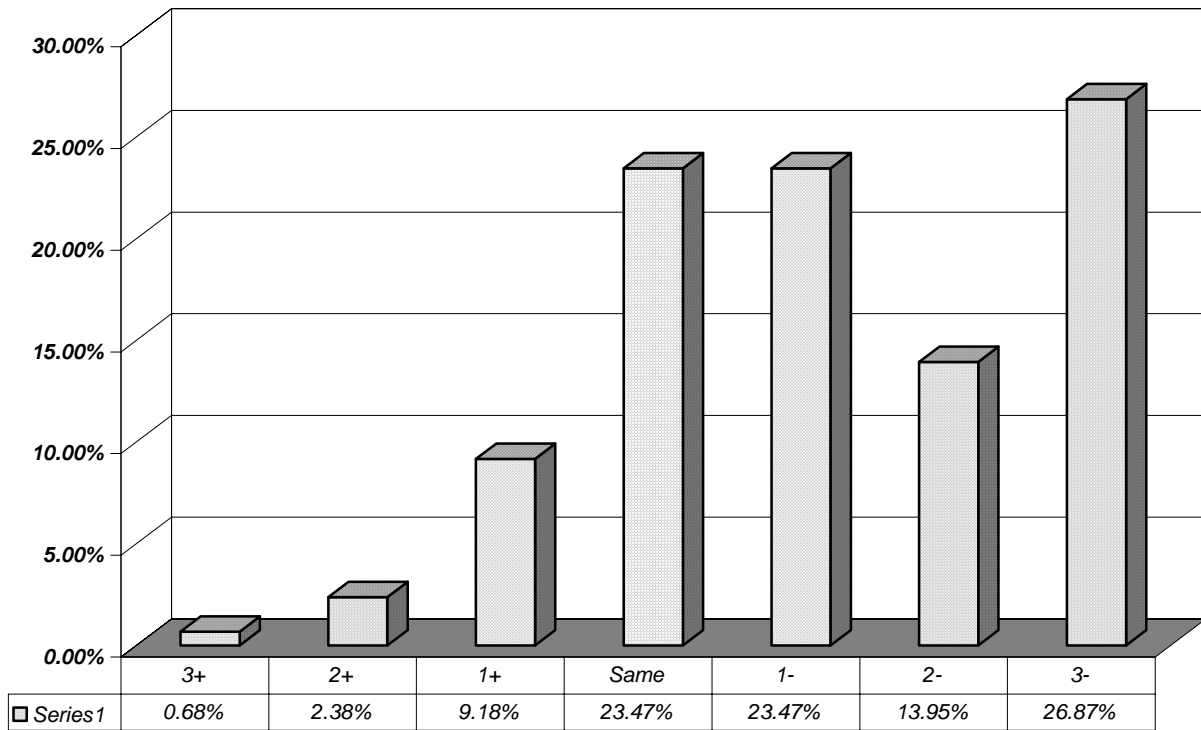
## Math Proficiency at Enrolment



**Difference Between English level at Enrolment and  
Highest Grade Previously Completed**



**Difference Between Math level at Enrolment and  
Highest Grade Previously Completed**



## *Curriculum*

The usage and usefulness of the various curriculum options are depicted in Table 2:

Table 2: Usage and Usefulness of Curriculum Options

<i>Curriculum Option</i>	<i>Programs Using</i>	<i>Usefulness (Average Rating)</i> <i>(Scale: 1= Very Useful to 4=Poor)</i>
Adult Basic Education	50%	1.8
Open Learning Agency	50%	1.9
Pathfinder Learning Systems	18.75%	2.66
Success Maker Learning Systems	50%	1.9
Locally Developed Curriculum	50%	1.3
Provincially Developed Curriculum	68.75%	1.73

As shown in Table 2, Adult Basic Education, Open Learning Agency, Success Maker Learning Systems, and Locally Developed Curriculum are used by half the programs reporting. They are generally rated between Useful and Very Useful, with locally developed curriculum getting the highest rating. Pathfinder is used by only 18.75% (3 programs) and its ratings were varied: 2 for Useful and 1 for Poor. Provincially developed curriculum (of various sorts) was being used by 11 of the 16 programs (68.75%) and was rated between Useful and Very Useful.

Teachers seem to combine curriculum from several sources to meet the needs of their students. Although a few programs used only one or two of the listed options, eleven programs (over 2/3 of the responders) indicated they used 3, 4, or 5 of the options on the list. The following comment from one instructor summed up this eclectic approach:

- We are just beginning with Success Maker but students are working through it well. I like the reports you are able to get for each student. The OLA packages for the most part are organized well and are easy to work through. For our Fundamental group we develop basic literacy and math skills to prepare students for harder courses. This curriculum is developed around IRPs.

Six of the programs gave details of the locally developed curriculum they used. Topics included local history, languages, traditional science, and cultural studies as well as introduction to computers, literacy, math, and food service training. All were rated 1 or 2. Six respondents also offered comments stressing the importance of locally developed curriculum with First Nations content. The following two comments were typical:

- While locally developed are best, they are labour intensive. Maintaining them requires key local resource person. Implementing by non-Natives is not a problem if adequate support & guidance is given
- We desperately need more curriculum with First Nations content.

The need for more First Nations specific curriculum was echoed by all of the participants in the project workshops.

Eight respondents gave details of provincially developed curriculum in use, of which 4 were distance education and/or correspondence materials (average usefulness rating = 2), with the remainder being school district materials (average usefulness rating = 1.67). The following three comments show the range of opinion:

- The Distance Education School courses have served us well. They permit a range of courses which would be impossible for a small school to provide otherwise. These courses are marked by markers qualified in the subject field and (it can be assumed) without bias or favoritism. These are particularly advantageous in school with only one or a few instructors.
- We use the IRPs from the Ministry and the teachers develop their own courses making sure that the learning outcomes are achieved.
- Because we can't offer a taught program, we have to utilize distance learning. It can be very tedious for our learners.

Under Other, 2 respondents mentioned use of the PLATO system, its average usefulness rating being 1.5.

## *Measures of Success*

### **Student Success**

Respondents were asked to indicate what measures of student success they use, other than standard ones like grade level achieved and test results. Although twenty individual instructors answered this question, 6 instructors seemed to misunderstand it, interpreting it as what makes students successful. For the purpose of this analysis, these six were not included in the analysis below, leaving a pool of fourteen respondents.

Five key themes emerged from the responses to this question:

- Attendance. For six instructors, simple attendance or an improvement in the pattern of attendance was seen as a measure of student success.
- Self-confidence/self-esteem. Six instructors highlighted increases in self-esteem, confidence, or feelings of self worth as measures of student success.
- Positive attitude. Seven instructors identified the adoption of more positive attitudes towards and enthusiasm for learning as an important factor.
- Behavioural change. A variety of specific behavioural changes ranging from turning in assignments on time, volunteering at school functions, and an increased level of cooperation with co-workers and co-students, to getting counselling about an abusive relationship, losing 30 lbs. as a result of a nutrition program, and decreases in negative behaviours like substance abuse were identified by five instructors as measures of student success.
- Goal orientation. Four instructors mentioned a greater focus on setting goals and planning for the future, especially in regard to education and employment.

## Program Success

Four themes emerged from the responses to this question:

- Fourteen of the twenty instructors responding to this question (70%) identified quantitative measures of student achievement such as marks on tests and assignments, grade levels achieved, course completion rates, graduation statistics, etc. as key measures of program success.
- The attendance theme emerged again, as eleven of the twenty (55%) considered continued attendance, that is, students simply showing up day after day, as a measure of the success of the program.
- For four instructors (20%), the number of students who successfully move on to further education or employment was a gauge of the success of their program. As one instructor said:
  - Traditional standards of success are grade levels, course completion, and student response. Personally, I gauge the success of our program largely on the student's ability to continue educational pursuits. Students must feel that the educational process serves to meet some ends, be that emotional, psychological, and or academic (our program achieves this).
- Six instructors (30%) noted impacts on the community as measures of the success of their program, e.g.,



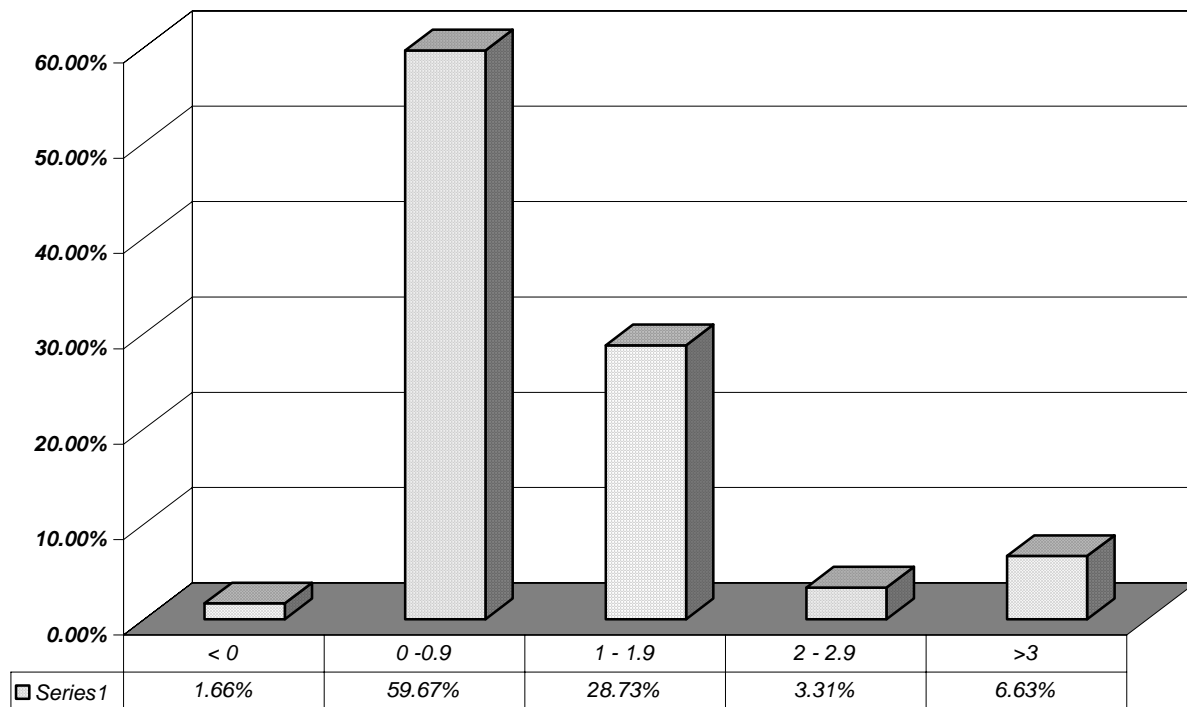
- The biggest factors I use are the emotional situation of the community. My program is based on community activities and I believe it has a very big impact on the results of the success.
- Zero incidence of suicides/homicides in community within last decade
- The enhanced appetite for learning within the community

Data from Part 2 of the survey was also relevant to the issue of student and program success. Increases in English and Math proficiency were calculated for those students for whom both entry and exit point assessments were available. Not all programs assess exit levels; only those student records for which both measures were available were included in the analysis. Therefore the number of cases on which these increase scores are based is 181 for English and 185 for Math, not the total of 477.

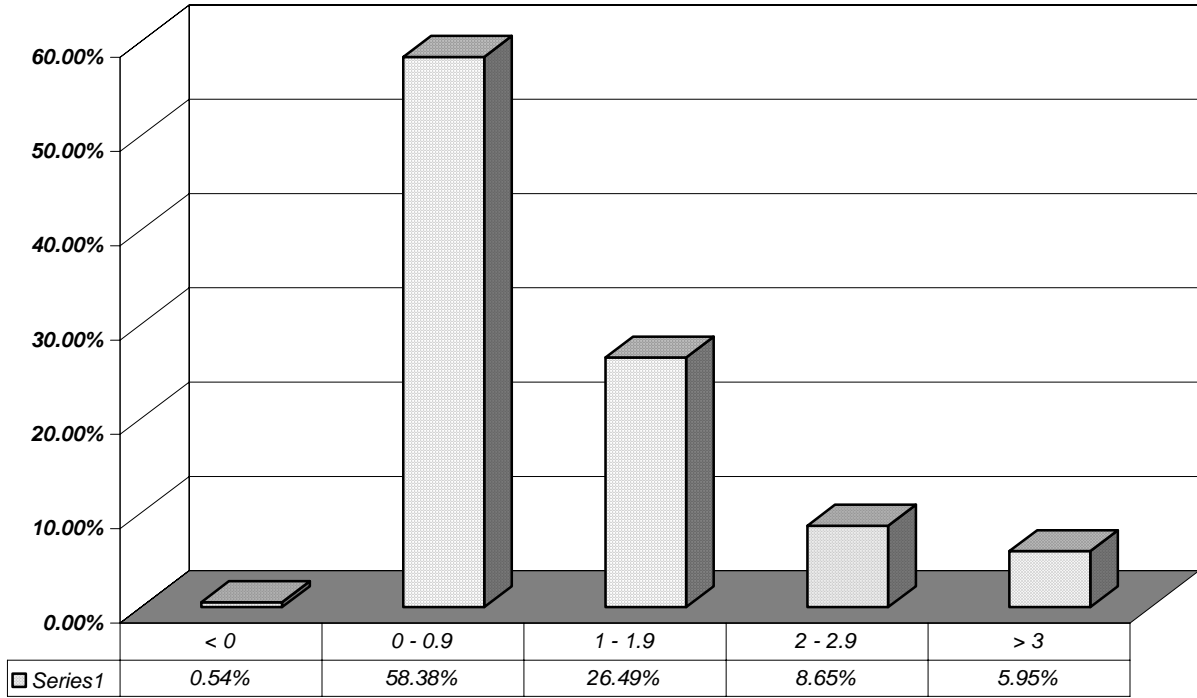
Charts on the following pages depict these results; highlights of these analyses are:

- almost 60% of the students gain up to 1 grade level in English over the course of a year, with 28.73% gaining between 1 and 2 grade levels, and almost 10% gaining 2 or more grade levels
- 58.38% of the students gain up to 1 grade level in Math over the course of a year, with 26.49% gaining between 1 and 2 grade levels, and almost 15% gaining 2 or more grade levels

## Increase in English

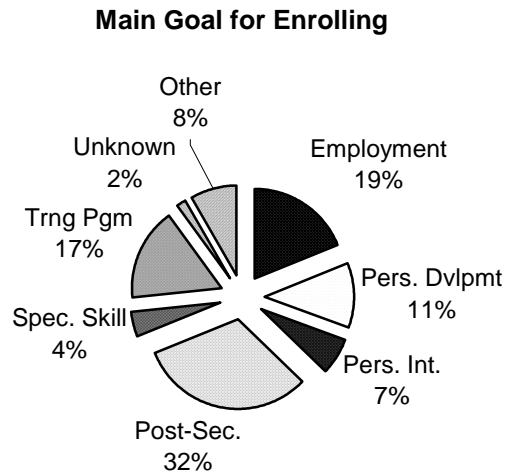


## Increase in Math



Another viewpoint on student and program success is provided by data from Part 2 of the survey showing:

- students' main goals when enrolling
- students' status at June 2000 (end of the program)
- extent to which students' goals were achieved
- students' status at January 2001 (7 months after program completion)



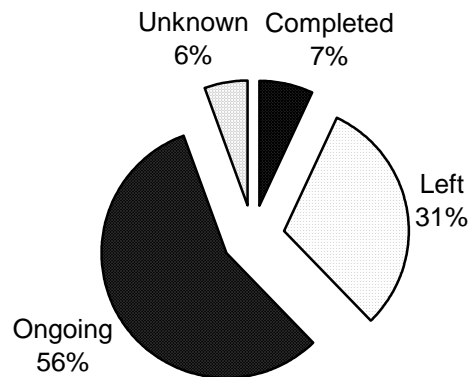
The three highest-ranking goals for students entering adult education programs are:

- to gain entrance to post-secondary education (32%)
- to help find employment (19%)
- to gain entrance to a training program (17%)<sup>4</sup>

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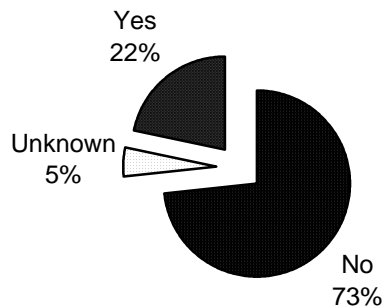
<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education Learner Outcome Survey showed slightly different results, including the main goal of a Dogwood diploma (52% of respondents), followed by post-secondary entry (27%), upgrading for training (7%), getting or improving job prospects (5%), improving skills/interest (4%); don't know (4%), and private training (2%).

### Student's Status at June 2000



After one year in the program, 31% had completed, 56% of the students were ongoing (would continue the next fall), and 7% had left. At the end of June 2000, of the students who had completed or left the program, 22% had achieved their main goal.

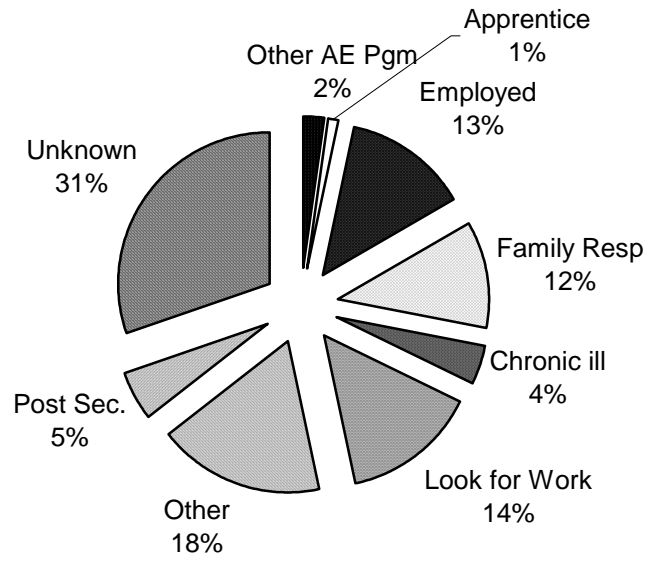
### Student Achieved Goal?



At January 2001 (7 months after program completion), compared to their original goals:

- 5% had gone on to post-secondary education
- 13% were employed and 14% were looking for work
- 3% were enrolled in another adult education or apprenticeship program

### Status at Jan. 2001



## *Barriers*

### Adults in the Community Unable to Enroll

Of the 16 schools/programs responding to the survey, 13 (81.25%) reported that there were adults in their area who wanted to enroll in the program but were unable to do so. Instructors were asked to indicate how many of these adults in the community found each of a number of factors a significant barrier to enrolment .

Table 3: Factors felt to be barriers to program enrolment by program instructors

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Percentage of instructors responding who thought each factor was a barrier to enrolment for all or most , many , some , or few or none of the adults in the community who were unable to enroll in the program</i>				<i>Average rating by instructors (Scale: 1 = All or most to 4 = few or none)</i>
	<i>All or most</i>	<i>Many</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Few or None</i>	
Lack of child care		29%	47%	24%	2.9
Travelling distance to program		7%	21%	71%	3.6
Lack of self-confidence or fear	13%	19%	56%	13%	2.7
Employment responsibilities	11%	33%	50%	6%	2.5
Family responsibilities	18%	41%	41%		2.2
Limited space in program	7%	7%	7%	80%	3.6
Students lack of finances	27%	20%	13%	40%	2.7
Personal development needs	6%	44%	38%	13%	2.6
Social assistance requirement	19%	19%	31%	31%	2.8
Special needs the program cannot handle	12%	6%	53%	29%	3.0

In the opinion of the surveyed instructors, traveling distance to program, and limited space do not appear to be major barriers to enrolment for adults in the community who were unable to enroll in the program. These instructors feel that all of the others are potential barriers for some, many, or all or most of the students, but the following factors head the list:

- Family responsibilities (average rating = 2.2; combined % for all or most and many = 59%)
- Employment responsibilities (average rating = 2.5; combined % for all or most and many = 44%)
- Personal development needs (average rating = 2.6; combined % for all or most and many = 50%)
- Students lack of finances (average rating = 2.7; combined % for all or most and many = 47%)
- Lack of self-confidence or fear (average rating = 2.7; combined % for all or most and many = 32%)

When asked to comment further if special needs was a barrier to enrolment:

- six respondents identified FAS/FAE, associated learning disabilities, and attention deficit symptoms
- three mentioned not having the resources or expertise to help those at very low literacy levels
- three described would-be students who needed more one-on-one help than the program could provide, one of whom identified himself as having special needs related to a learning disability and we did not have the skill or other resources to help him.

When asked to indicate if other factors were barriers to enrolment:

- six instructors mentioned finances and the need to take employment to support a family, including one who said:
  - temporary employment incentives during the school year take students away from the program and then students don't return
- six described various ways in which potential students lacked support from family and friends in their desire to undertake education, e.g.,
  - From a sociological perspective, some students must deal with parents and grandparents who view education as a vehicle by which the young people are removed from the community, i.e., students leave to go to post-secondary training and then do not return perhaps due to residential school times.
  - The male population has not embraced education as an important goal to the same extent as the female part of the population it may not be the macho thing to do.
  - peer pressure from drinking partners
- four mentioned substance abuse, i.e., alcohol and drugs



- four mentioned lack of confidence or low self-esteem

## Factors Causing Enrollees Significant Difficulty

Instructors were also asked to indicate for students who did enroll, how many found each of a number of factors a significant difficulty while in school.

Table 4: Factors felt by instructors to be sources of significant difficulty to students enrolled in the program

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Percentage of instructors responding who thought each factor caused significant difficulty for all or most, many, some, or few or none of the students enrolled in the program</i>				<i>Average rating by instructors (Scale: 1 = All or most to 4 = few or none)</i>
	<i>All or most</i>	<i>Many</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Few or None</i>	
Lack of child care	5%	26%	53%	16%	2.8
Travelling distance to program		6%	12%	82%	3.8
Lack of self-confidence or fear	16%	42%	42%		2.3
Employment responsibilities	5%	37%	42%	16%	2.7
Family responsibilities	25%	25%	45%	5%	2.3
Lack of finances	33%	17%	28%	22%	2.4
Special needs the program cannot handle	5%	16%	37%	42%	3.2
Personal development needs	16%	26%	47%	11%	2.5

In the opinion of these instructors, traveling distance to program, and special needs do not appear to cause significant difficulty to students enrolled in the program. These instructors feel that all of the others are potential causes of significant difficulty for some, many, or all or most of the students, but the following factors head the list:

- Family responsibilities (average rating = 2.3; combined % for all or most and many = 50%)
- Lack of self-confidence or fear (average rating = 2.3; combined % for all or most and many = 58%)

- Lack of finances (average rating = 2.4; combined % for all or most and many = 50%)
- Personal development needs (average rating = 2.5; combined % for all or most and many = 42%)

In the project workshops, many participants expanded upon the barriers identified above, particularly in terms of the family and employment responsibilities. Many people suggested that because of those other responsibilities, many students are forced to enroll and attend the adult education programs according to varied schedules, making it difficult to implement the one September nominal roll date effectively.

### *Other Comments*

The survey respondents were also offered the opportunity to add any additional comments regarding the design and delivery of successful adult education programs.

Four instructors stressed the social/emotional underpinnings needed to make an adult education experience successful, e.g.,

- It is important to involve students socially as well as academically to keep spirits up. Things such as barbeques, holiday celebrations, graduations, etc. are great ways to maintain an enjoyable environment and positive attitude in staff and students.
- It is paramount that instructors take time to establish a personal relationship with each student. This is to ensure that students feel comfortable and safe enough in the school environment to take the risks required of any person (adult in particular) who is pursuing education.
- Personal counseling was needed Talking circle was established to ensure group interaction

Three instructors spoke of the need for a program to be tied to the real world outside the classroom, but the nature of this tie differed in each case:

- Being able to see the world through a larger scope is needed. Some students have never gone to Vancouver, yet their studies include Government. I think many will benefit by actually visiting the parliament building.
- [the centre] has implemented a Frierean approach as a means of enhancing the level of literacy here based on the idea that literacy programs are most effective if the residents have access to literature which is readily available, relevant to their every day life and informative. This means that the literature is highly functional rather than formal

- one program advocated joint partnerships (i.e., cooperative education) between industry and education, employing instructors from education and industry, and combine[d] funding to cover education/employment training.

Three mentioned financial issues:

- we operate on a continuous intake policy, however, the funding structure only recognizes the enrolment at the end of September. This presents a funding squeeze since many of our prospective students are involved in silviculture contracts until the snow stops this work (in Oct. or Nov.). Also many students return to contract work early in the spring, often before they complete their course work
- The government (provincial) stated that Adult Ed was free. It is in the cities, but for us to offer the program here we have to pay \$300 per course for distance ed.
- one suggested pay adult education students to attend school on a regular basis (incentive).

Other comments covered topics as diverse as the need for locally developed curriculum, the usefulness of individualized instruction, and the value of a link to a post-secondary institution.

## Summary

This exploration of the First Nations adult education programs in BC was intended to outline some of the major characteristics of the programs and their students. Generally, it is clear that the First Nations adult secondary education programs serve students with a broad range of ages, backgrounds, and experiences. Those students enroll in the programs for a variety of reasons, including a desire to pursue post-secondary education opportunities, for self-improvement, or to attain specific training or employment skills. As such, the programs must be flexible in order to address the tremendous range of student needs. The survey findings show that the programs are about much more than the granting of a Dogwood diploma, and success of the programs and the students cannot be measured through that indicator alone.

The survey research also demonstrates that students in the education programs must overcome significant barriers in order to enroll, and are faced with challenges throughout their program participation. Family responsibilities, employment obligations, and a general lack of self-esteem and feelings of intimidation are concerns for many students. The support that the students need is therefore significant. However, the survey results also show that, in spite of the challenges, students are making progress in the adult secondary education programs, demonstrated by the increases in the grade levels at which they are assessed, as well as by their ability to fulfill their many other goals.

It is important to continue pursuing work in this area, to collect stronger information and explore the issues highlighted in this paper in more detail. It is also crucial that the findings of this work be given significant attention by FNEESC and the DIA. Several of the most important issues for consideration are highlighted below.

## Recommendations and Issues for Further Consideration

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### Policy Development

- One finding from the research process relates to the inadequacy of current funding levels for adult education programs. The creative funding alternatives being attempted by program organizers are not addressing this situation. Funding levels provided for adult secondary education programs should be carefully reviewed and evaluated in terms of their adequacy.
- First Nations adult students respond best to curricula that is culturally appropriate and relevant to their lives and experiences. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of such curricula, much of which must be developed and/or enhanced locally. Current funding levels should be adjusted to make it possible for programs to address the need for culturally relevant curricula. In the meantime, many of the project participants suggested the usefulness of Open Learning Agency (OLA) materials. Therefore, OLA materials should be accepted for funding purposes.
- It is important that program structures and program funding requirements be flexible, to reflect students' needs to acquire work when it is available and meet their family obligations. Responding to this issue may involve reexamining the timing of the nominal roll count, and possibly setting more than one date to respond to seasonal cultural and employment realities in First Nations communities.
- It must be recognized that the goals of students enrolled in adult secondary education programs vary significantly. Many adult students pursue further education to develop skills for employment and/or personal development. In addition, the grade levels at which students enter the programs are quite different. As such, the pursuit of the Dogwood diploma may not be an appropriate, realistic, or relevant goal for all adult students. Program structures and funding requirements should reflect that reality.
- Many of the students enrolled in First Nations controlled adult education programs are working at a fundamental or literacy level. The survey findings showed that for 47% of the students, the highest level completed before enrolling in the adult program was grade 9 or less. In addition, the initial assessments of the students showed that one-half of the students had English skills of grade 8 or below, and that 60% of the students had math skills at grade 8 or below. That fact must be taken into consideration in terms of the 8 course for a full-time FTE requirement. The counting of literacy courses in terms of FTEs is problematic.

- The challenges many adult students face are significant. The survey identified family responsibilities, employment responsibilities, and personal development as among the key challenges. In addition, many adult students enrolled in the First Nations programs are older, and may have been out of school for many years. Almost 40% of the surveyed students have been out of school for more than 10 years. Students in those circumstances often require significant support, including adequate counseling services a need which is difficult to address given existing funding levels. The characteristics of many adult learners also make it difficult for them to take eight courses the current requirements for a full time equivalent (FTE) student. The requirements should therefore be changed to lower the FTE course requirements for adult students.

## Research

- There is a lack of culturally relevant assessment tools. This need should be addressed through efforts to identify whether assessment tools not considered through this research exist and, if so, whether those tools are more culturally relevant. Future research could also include the development of culturally relevant assessment tools.
- Given that this study explored issues related to barriers to adult secondary education programs, research should be undertaken to determine what facilitates the enrollment and successful completion of secondary education programs by First Nations adults.

## Information Sharing

- The participants at the project workshop clearly indicated that it is sometimes to difficult for program organizers to meet DIA funding requirements in terms of record keeping and individual education plan development. This situation is largely a result of misunderstandings about the criteria that will be used by program auditors. There is a need for better information sharing to ensure that the programs adequately prepare for program reviews, and it would be useful to offer program representatives direct assistance in this regard.
- It is important to celebrate the success of the First Nations controlled adult secondary education programs. The programs are striving to provide flexible, supportive, safe environments that adapt to student needs. The programs are also contributing to community needs. The students enrolled in the programs are also showing significant progress, generally increasing one or more grade levels per year.

# Appendix One

## First Nations Adult Secondary Research Project Original Terms of Reference

The Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) have been involved in discussions regarding adult secondary education for the past two years. The initial discussions were prompted by the results of the nominal roll reviews that were initiated by DIA in 1995. In conducting these reviews, DIA found that its policy on adult secondary education was inadequate. The policy mirrors the policy of the provincial Ministry of Education, and does not provide solid direction for First Nations regarding implementation of effective adult secondary programs.

This is an issue of significant concern given the increasing numbers of adults returning for adult secondary education. The numbers increased from 516 in 1989 to more than 3000 in 1996. These numbers have since decreased significantly due to the rigour with which DIA has conducted the nominal roll reviews but recent provincial statistics suggest the number will begin to climb again as First Nations programs comply with DIA policy. The provincial Ministry of Education 1995-96 Annual Report shows that merely 31% of First Nations learners in the provincial system graduate. Eventually many of these people will be seeking to complete their education or to upgrade their skills in some fashion.

In April 1997, a First Nations Adult Secondary Education Policies and Programs Handbook was prepared for FNESC and DIA by Margo Greenwood. The purpose of this handbook was to share information amongst First Nations regarding: the components of successful adult programs, the process of accreditation for the granting of diplomas; the steps involved in developing student learning plans; and federal and provincial policies related to adult secondary education programs. This document has received wide distribution within First Nations communities and has been very useful.

Over the course of the last year, the adult secondary education sub-committee has been working with DIA, using the recommendations in this handbook to draft a new adult secondary policy. However, the immediate impetus to do this has been removed by the province maintaining its current policy and by the department moving to block funding for regions.

The recommendation has been made by the committee to maintain the current policy for the next fiscal year. This interim policy requires First Nations programs to meet the following two criteria:

- the program of study must lead to a Dogwood diploma; and,
- a student learning plan must be in place that describes the route towards the Dogwood diploma.



This is an interim measure, given that many other factors now need to be considered in the development of a new adult secondary education policy. Some of these factors will be considered during the course of the proposed work.

A further impetus for conducting the proposed work is the federal government's response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which is entitled Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan.

In this action plan the government has committed \$350 million to support the development of community-based healing as a means of dealing with the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the Residential School system.

Human Resources Development Canada will be developing a five-year Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, supported by a private sector driven Council, to improve Aboriginal People's access to jobs.

On pages 26 and 27 of the Gathering Strength document the minister does refer to specific intentions in Aboriginal education. They are as follows:

Working with First Nations the government will support education reform on reserves. The objective will be to improve the quality and cultural relevance of education for First Nations students; improve the classroom effectiveness of teachers; support community and parental involvement in schools; improve the management and support capacity of First Nations systems; and enhance learning by providing greater access to technology for First Nations schools.

The purpose of this exercise is to gather further information that will feed into this policy development process and propose recommendations for a co-ordinated approach to adult secondary education.

## **Project Objectives**

The objectives of this project are to build on the work already completed in the First Nations Adult Secondary Education Handbook by collecting further data, and to look at the academic impacts of the provincial and residential school systems.

## **Project Components and Activities**

This work will involve three primary components, with a number of activities to be undertaken in each component.

### **Component One -- Information Survey and Analysis**

The activities relevant to this component would include the development, testing and implementation of a survey tool to gather relevant information and prepare a written analysis to be distributed to First Nations. The information to be included in this survey may include, but is not necessarily limited to:

- profiles of adult learners (including information like, why are they returning to school, where are they heading after this education program, what issues exist around day care for adult learners,...);
- what curriculum is being used to meet the needs of adult learners and is it meeting their needs;
- looking at the progression of adult learners in English and math; and,
- projection of need for adult secondary programs if at all possible.

## **Component Two    Adult Secondary Education Workshops**

The second component will involve workshops regarding adult secondary education programs. These workshops will be presented in First Nations communities, with the aim of promoting discussion and dialogue, and a sharing of the information gathered in the first component of this project. They will also serve to complement and enhance the information gathered via the survey tool.

Specifically, the workshops will provide an opportunity for First Nations adult educators and directors to share information regarding programs in their communities. They will also provide an opportunity for First Nations educators to begin looking at (or for some, share their existing) Human Resource Development Plans that foresee planning for community needs and working with community members to build stronger communities.

This component will include the design of an agenda, as well as the development of materials and information packages for distribution at the workshops.

## **Component Three - - Preparation of Final Report**

This final component will see the preparation of a final report that includes findings, recommendations and questions brought out through the survey and regional workshops.

## Appendix Two Project Survey