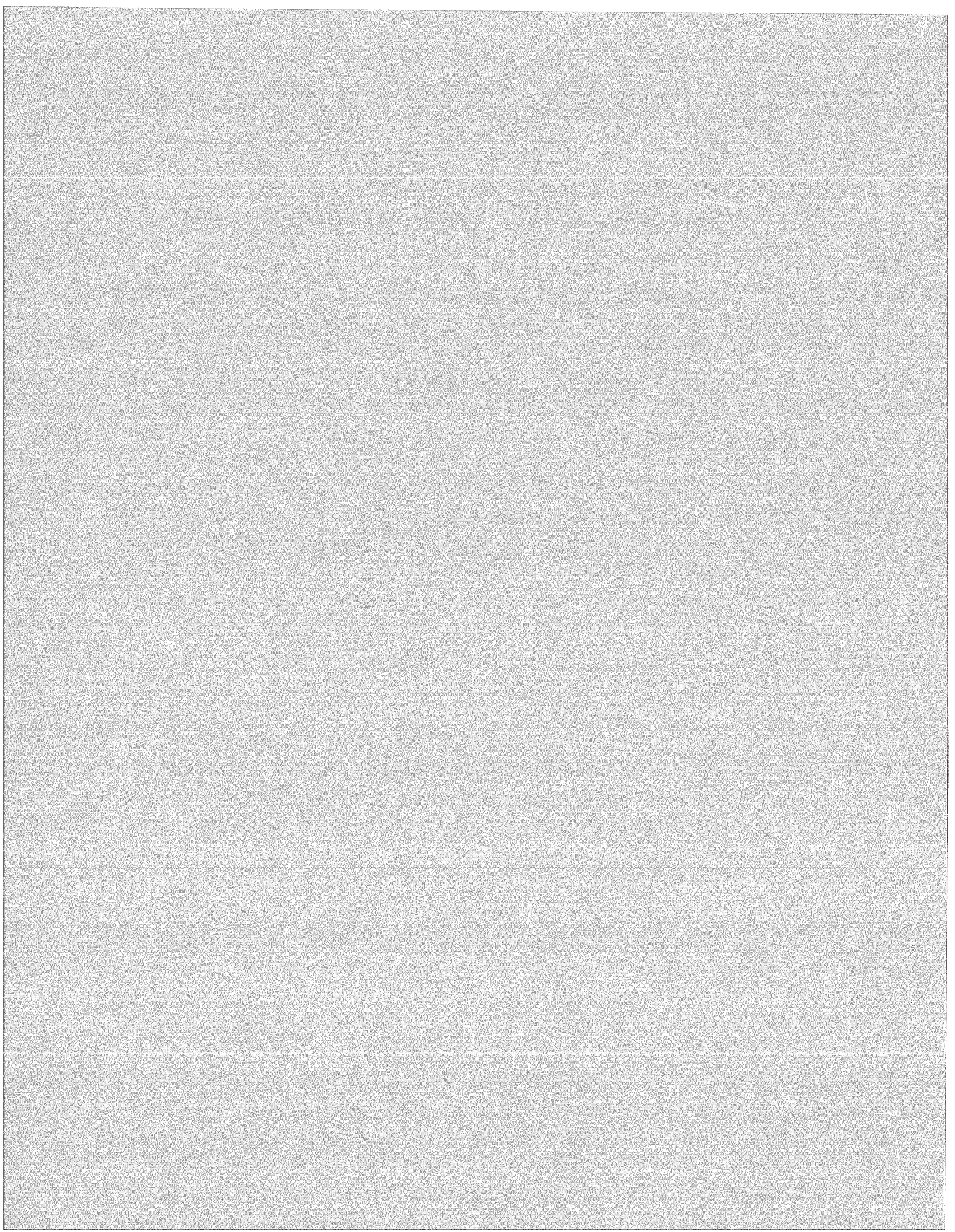


# **First Nations Schools: Challenging and Rewarding Places to Teach**

**A Report Prepared for the  
First Nations Schools Association  
and the  
First Nations Education Steering Committee  
By Barbara Kavanagh**

**April, 2000**





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## Introduction

Since the establishment of the earliest First Nations schools in British Columbia over 25 years ago, more and more First Nations have established their own schools to deliver the education programs they desire for their children. There are now over 120 First Nations controlled schools in this province, of varying sizes and offering a range of grade levels. The work of First Nations schools has been explored through numerous past research projects sponsored by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). Those projects have provided information about issues such as the goals and expectations of the schools and the communities in which they operate, community and parental involvement programs, school governance, school assessment processes, calendar options, and special education.

This particular project was initiated in order to gain a better understanding of one of the key aspects of First Nations schools – their teaching staffs. The direct relationship between the success of schools and the strength and dedication of their teachers is clear. Recognizing that importance, this research project was initiated in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of teachers in First Nations schools. Specifically, in sponsoring this research, the FNSEA and FNESC aimed to gather information about why teachers are attracted to employment opportunities in First Nations schools, as well as any challenges and possible resources and support activities that may be offered to ensure that they have the most positive experiences possible while working in the schools.

Prior to the undertaking of this research, anecdotal information had been provided to the FNSEA and FNESC, suggesting that many of the teachers who apply for

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employment in First Nations schools are relatively recent graduates with limited teaching experience. Many schools have also been said to experience high staff turn over rates, with few teachers who have lengthy experience in the school and/or community. It is true that First Nations schools are presented with numerous challenges in terms of attracting and retaining qualified staff. The schools are provided with very limited funding, which means that many First Nations schools are unable to offer compensation at a comparable level to their neighbouring school districts. Similarly, many of the schools experience difficulty in offering benefits and pension plans to their employees. However, many people have also suggested that the schools offer unique and simulating employment opportunities, with numerous benefits that cannot be found in other teaching environments. The research described in this report was intended to explore these issues in more detail, and to test some of the anecdotal assertions that have been made.

## Project Methodology

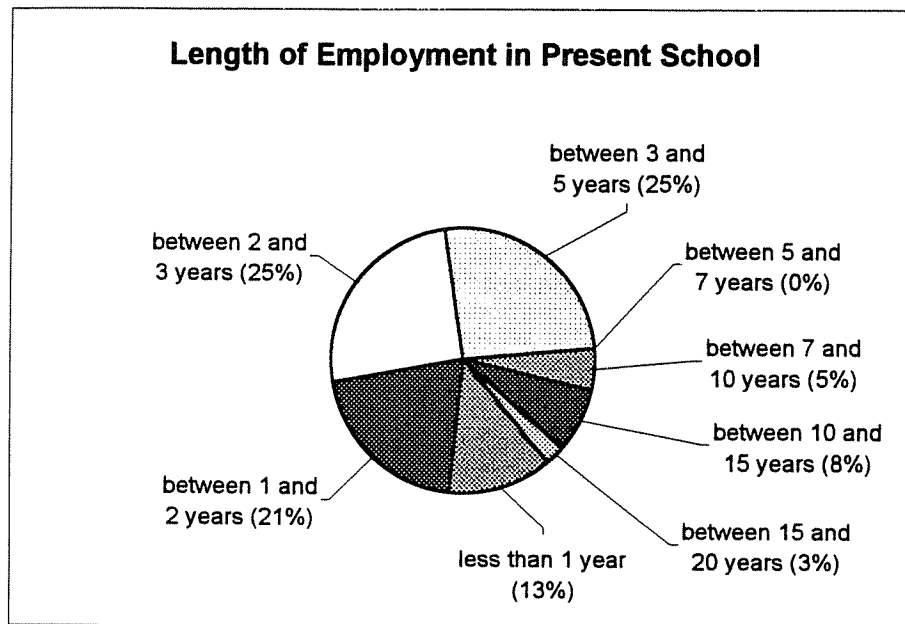
This project consisted of an informational survey for teachers. Surveys were sent to the principals/administrators of First Nations schools, with a letter requesting that the surveys be distributed to all teachers in the school. A cover letter was also sent with the surveys indicating that participation in the project was completely voluntary, and that the surveys could be returned with complete anonymity (please see attached copy of the survey package that was distributed).

A total of forty-one surveys were returned to the FNSA/FNESC office. Although the teachers were not asked to disclose either their name or where they teach, many of the returned surveys did indicate a school name. That information demonstrated that the teachers responding to the survey work in at least twenty-two different schools (with an additional four surveys of unknown origin). That number represents approximately eighteen percent of the 121 First Nations schools in BC. The schools included in the research also reflect a broad geographical distribution, with teachers from the North, Northwest, Central Interior, Okanagan, Kootenays, various parts of Vancouver Island, and the Lower Mainland all taking part.

## Survey Responses

### Previous Teaching Experience of the Respondents

In the survey, the teachers were first asked to indicate the length of time they had been teaching in their present school. Over one half of the respondents had been working in their school for between 2 and 5 years, with seventy percent indicating that they had been teaching in their school for between 1 and 5 years. Only 15% of the teachers had been working in their present school for over 5 years.



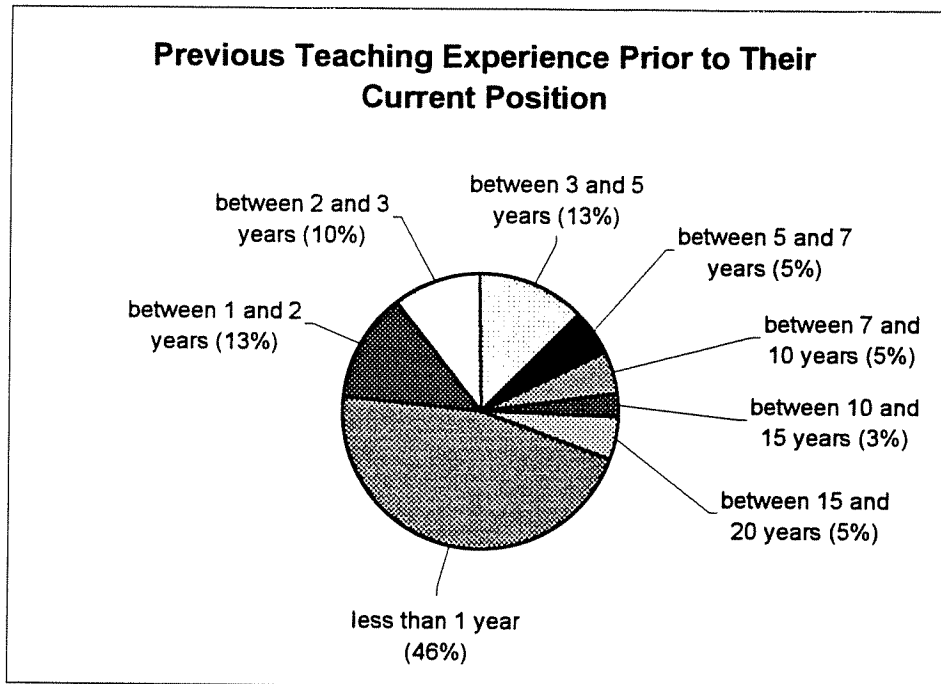
This result may be related to the length of time various First Nations schools have been in operation. Many First Nations schools have begun operating within the past several years. In addition, the result may reflect the inability of First Nations schools to offer competitive salaries and benefit and pension packages, referred to in the introduction to this paper. The result does appear to support suggestions made previously regarding the relatively new teaching staffs of many schools.



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When asked whether they had taught in a different First Nations school prior to their current position, over 57% of the survey respondents indicated that they had not done so. This result supports the anecdotal assertion of many First Nations representatives who have suggested that many of the individuals who begin teaching in First Nations schools have had little or no previous experience in a similar setting.

The third question included in the survey also supported assertions by First Nations representatives, indicating that many *beginning* teachers seek employment in First Nations schools, which are often more likely to hire individuals with limited teaching experience. Almost one half of the survey respondents indicated that they had been teaching for less than one year prior to teaching in any First Nations school.



## **Factors That Attract Teachers to First Nations Schools and Aspects of First Nations Schools That Make Them Comfortable, Professionally Stimulating, and Enjoyable Places to Work**

When asked what factors had first attracted them to First Nations schools, and when asked what factors make the schools comfortable, professionally stimulating, and enjoyable places to work, the survey respondents indicated a number of factors, as outlined below.

### **Work Opportunities**

In terms of what first attracted them to working in a First Nations school, eleven of the survey respondents reinforced a reason that was suggested in the introductory comments above; the schools were willing to offer *new* teachers a job opportunity. For example, one teacher whose career began in a First Nations school noted “I learned about the job after I graduated. I was excited about the opportunity to teach here. As a first year teacher it has been a great experience.” Three of the survey respondents also noted that the First Nations school was able to offer them a continuing job opportunity, which made the employment offer more attractive to them.

### **Making a Positive Contribution**

In addition to these basic factors, many other aspects of First Nations schools were highlighted as equally or more important in terms of attracting and keeping teachers. Several survey respondents indicated their interest in being an active

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participant in a learning environment that makes a difference for First Nations learners, and their desire to “be helpful.” For example, one survey respondent highlighted as one of the most positive aspects of employment in a First Nations school the fact that “I feel that I am making a positive difference.”

Five survey respondents specifically indicated that their interest in working in a First Nations school was related to the fact that they are First Nations people. The opportunity to be a role model was noted as important by those individuals, as was the chance to “share my knowledge and expertise with my people” and “teach the children of my reserve.” One survey respondent also indicated:

I am a First Nations person and I wanted to serve my community.  
I am a product of negative educational experiences (such as Residential school), so I am aware of the barriers to learning and success. I wanted to be a part of resolutions/solutions.

### Positive Previous Experiences

Nine of the survey respondents who indicated that they are not First Nations people also indicated that their past experiences and knowledge of the particular area and people had made them feel that they would enjoy working in a First Nations school. One respondent highlighted as a motivating factor previous positive experiences with children in First Nations schools through Teacher on Call work. Another individual stated that “as a child, I lived in a First Nations community, and I always felt comfortable in First Nations communities.” Similarly, another individual noted that “some of the friendships I made in my school years pointed me in this direction, and I have always felt that this is the type of school I would like to work in.”

## **Opportunities for New Experiences**

The opportunity for people working in First Nations schools to learn about and experience a different culture was also highlighted by fourteen of the survey respondents as attractive, fascinating, interesting, stimulating, and very beneficial. One person, for example, noted that “cultural songs, dances, and language integrated into the classroom enriches all lives – students’ and teachers’.” Several respondents indicated that specific aspects of First Nations cultures attracted them to the schools and made them feel comfortable in the work environments they offer, such as the encouragement of acceptance and respect, and a healthy relationship with the environment. One survey respondent in particular noted that:

I studied education and when I finished, I returned to [my home community and began volunteering in a First Nations school]. My emotional health at that time was not good, and the children at the school gave me at least as much as I gave them. ... I believe that my [spiritual healing] journey began there with the hugs of those children.

## **Advantages of Small Schools and Rural Communities**

Several of the survey respondents also indicated that the small school environment and small class sizes contribute to a comfortable atmosphere and teaching environment, allowing teachers to know all of the children. Eleven survey respondents noted a small school environment as a key characteristic that attracted them to working in a First Nations school and as an important, positive aspect of the work environments they continue to provide to their teaching staffs. Five of the survey respondents also noted their attraction to communities located



far from urban centers, in areas where the physical environment is peaceful, beautiful and offers interesting recreation opportunities.

### **Flexible Work Environments**

According to many survey respondents, related to the small size of most First Nations schools is a flexible work environment, which was noted by ten survey respondents as very positive. Small schools, it was suggested, are able to spend their funding on programs and workshops that are of benefit to their children, and small schools are able to effectively implement flexible education programs, such as those structured around themes. One survey respondent indicated that First Nations schools are able to demonstrate “honesty and courage to forge ahead and provide a type of service that adapts as needed to offer a blended model of learning and healing” and another respondent suggested that First Nations schools are able to be on the “leading edge” of education. Yet another respondent noted:

I am comfortable with the pace of the school. I feel free to teach what I want to the children and to teach them what they want to learn. It is stimulating in that I feel like my own boss. This has made me more professional. It is a very enjoyable place to teach at times, although it can be very challenging.

Two of the survey respondents also suggested that the lack of unionized staff in First Nations schools is a positive factor that contributes to the flexibility their teachers are allowed.

### **Positive Relationships With Colleagues, Parents, and Students**

Twelve respondents noted that First Nations schools, again in part because of their relatively small size, also foster close working relationships and a working

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environment that is “team-based” and “gets results.” The schools’ teachers and other staff members were said to be “very willing to share,” “friendly” and “helpful.” For example, one survey respondent noted that “the teaching assistants are very valuable, and they keep us informed of what is happening in the community and in our students’ lives.” Another respondent indicated that “our staff pulls together and works well as a team.” First Nations school personnel were referred to by several respondents as “enthusiastic,” “young and energetic,” and one person commented that “I have always found the atmosphere to be positive and discussion has been towards enhancing student progress.” Several people noted that they felt particularly appreciated in a First Nations school, making their work situation much more pleasant, and one respondent noted that: “the flexibility and adaptability needed to work in these schools is amazing. It can be a very pleasant situation given a strong, cohesive staff.”

Similarly, many of the survey respondents noted that interacting in positive ways in small, “close-knit” communities is an enjoyable aspect of teaching in a First Nations school. The desire to live and participate in a community was noted specifically by five of the survey respondents as a reason they initially wanted to teach in a First Nations schools. One respondent, for example, emphasized her attraction to the benefit of “having a community as the basis for direct decision-making with regard to the education of their children,” and favourably noted that the decision-making of many First Nations schools considers the specific learning needs of the students, families, and communities.

In terms of their relationship with the First Nations communities, many survey respondents highlighted as particularly beneficial their close relationships with parents. One respondent, for example, noted that “interacting with community members, especially parents, has been a good way for me to form positive,

respectful, and trusting relationships.” The “family-type relationships” that some survey respondents experienced, while sometimes blurring “professional boundaries,” were also said to “allow for some better relationships with parents and students” and to foster environments in which teachers “work effectively with parents as dynamic partners in their children’s education.” As one individual stated:

The family style environment at the school I work in brings the students and staff closer. Being closer makes it easier for teachers and students to deal with any problems that arise.

Several respondents also spoke specifically about the children who attend First Nations schools, who were said to be “very giving and loving” and as having a great sense of humour. Several people indicated that they “had become very attached to the students,” and that “the students are wonderful and one continually hopes to help them reach their potential.” One respondent, for example, commented that:

I enjoyed attending a college in the North, and I fell in love with how empowering the instructors and courses were. I wanted to become part of that magic and work for and with First Nations students and help them reach their goals and realize their dreams.

Another respondent stated:

There is a spirit here that guides students to where they need to go. There is the laughter, the understanding, and an empathy I have not encountered in other institutions.

Generally, the closeness of students and staff were said to make a First Nations school comfortable and pleasant places to work, and as one respondent commented, “enjoyable relationships are the foundation of learning, and this job is living proof of that.”

### Attractiveness of a Challenging Work Environment

The challenging nature of teaching in First Nations schools was also highlighted by eleven survey respondents as a key reason they were initially attracted to teaching in the schools, and a positive feature of the work environments they provide. One survey respondent, for example, referred to the stimulating challenge of developing and implementing a worthwhile education program that is also culturally relevant and sensitive. Another teacher also indicated that a working situation that is highly challenging creates an environment that is personally motivating and very rewarding. Eight other survey respondents made general reference to the challenge of making a real difference, such as one teacher who commented that:

It is extremely challenging. There has not been one day this year when I have been bored. I am dealing with unique children who have a variety of personalities and learning levels. Learning to try and reach all students has been hard, frustrating, and exciting. I have really enjoyed working with the staff at my school. Everyone is very supportive of one another.



## Challenging Aspects of Employment in First Nations Schools

As noted above, the challenging work environment offered by First Nations schools is seen by many people as quite positive, and as one survey respondent noted, “teaching is always a challenge, no matter what the setting.” Sometimes, however, the challenges that exist can cause some frustration. For that reason, the survey created for this project was intended to explore some of the challenging aspects of employment in First Nations schools, as well as possible support and resources to help teachers in their efforts to address those challenges.

### Limited Staff Availability

The survey respondents offered a number of suggestions in terms of challenges and possible means of support, many of which were directly related to the limited funding provided to First Nations schools. For example, many survey respondents noted that their schools have a lack of professional support and resource people who are familiar with the particular needs of First Nations students. Various survey respondents referred to a lack of trained language and culture teachers, school psychologists, language therapists, school counselors, and classroom assistants. One teacher commented that in her school the staff is constantly forced to “do without, such as a school secretary, and no release time to organize and attend IEP meetings.” As a result, the teacher went on to note, existing staff people are “expected to subsidize the school with unpaid labour.” Several other respondents also suggested that the staff of First Nations schools “spend far too much time in a day at work or doing work related activities,” and still “do not have enough time to see the students who need ongoing intensive help.” There was also said to be a lack of relief and preparation time for teachers.

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This situation was said to be further complicated by high rates of teacher turnover, resulting in a young staff and few colleagues who can act as mentors. As one individual noted:

Some village teachers, particularly secondary, are expected to cover so many subjects that they are in distress. They can't take enough care of themselves to relax and live a normal life. First year teachers are especially taxed.

When asked about possible areas for greater support and resources, ten of the survey respondents also commented on the lack of personnel. Some of the specific suggestions offered included the hiring of more supervisors, a lunch program organizer, support workers, teaching assistants, and more personnel to assist students one-on-one. As one respondent commented, "more people would mean more time for teachers and less stress and burn out." The hiring of school counselors was also highlighted by many respondents as a necessity for many schools, as was the need to recognize the importance of self-care and wellness programs for teachers. To address this situation, most First Nations schools would clearly require greater funding than they are presently provided.

### **Lack of Special Education Resources**

Another area that was highlighted in particular in terms of limited resources and personnel was special education. Almost half of the teachers who responded to the survey emphasized this specific area as a highly challenging area, particularly given the limited financial support First Nations schools receive for special education. One respondent, for example, noted that "we get children who have had problems in the public system (particularly behavioural), and we are expected to fix these problems with little resources and/or money to help." Many other

surveyed teachers noted the high level of special needs students in their schools, which was said to “cause great stress for teachers.”

Again, when asked about what types of support and resources would help address the challenges of working in a First Nations school, fifteen respondents identified the area of special education specifically. Some of the comments made in this regard include “with so many special needs students in the classroom it is almost impossible to teach, “school special education support staff is needed,” and “many children need and would benefit from formal testing and having IEPs written and followed.” Generally, people identified a need for assistance in developing and maintaining alternative programs for those students who cannot handle the mainstream program, and “more help in the area of special needs specifically geared to First Nations students.” Several teachers also noted their own need for more training in special education, and six survey respondents commented specifically that teachers who are new to First Nations schools should study issues associated with special education.

### **General Lack of Resources**

The lack of other resources available to schools was also identified generally. Among the issues highlighted in this regard were an old school building, no gym or library, out-of-date textbooks, manuals, and testing materials, and limited supplies and testing materials. Some of the suggestions made for more support and resources included “some sort of partnership with the local school board to share resources, libraries, and professionals, such as psychologists, learning assistants, etc.” Many respondents also identified the tremendous challenge of delivering mainstream curriculum to First Nations students, highlighting the need for more culturally relevant materials, books, and videos. As one respondent

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noted, “special curriculum that covers the BC requirements, but with contents specific to First Nations would be stimulating to the students.” In response to the limited resources available in many First Nations schools, one survey respondent suggested the development of a “Learning Resource Centre,” containing videos, films, computer software, education kits, etc., so that teachers and schools could borrow resources. As that respondent noted, “most First Nations schools have to buy these resources, whereas through a center, funding could be shared.”

First Nations schools were also said to vary in terms of their ability to offer long-term, stable work environments. As described above, several survey respondents stated that part of their attraction to employment in First Nations schools was the offer of long-term employment. However, several other respondents stated that a significant challenge for them was the fact that the school in which they were teaching could offer only year-to-year contracts. One teacher stated, for example:

After a total of 8 years in First Nations schools, next year will be my last. The reason? No long-term tenure, and year-to-year contracts. As a family man, I have to consider my family’s financial security.

Other similar issues noted by the respondents included the provision of “incentives for teachers staying on.” Some of the ideas mentioned in terms of reducing staff turnover included regular wage raises based on public school standards, travel assistance for people working in isolated communities (such as one paid trip out per year), and a recognition of the physical and financial stress caused by long commutes into some communities.



### Isolation

Several teachers made other comments related to the isolation of many First Nations schools. As noted above, while many people perceive an employment opportunity in a remote setting as having significant benefits, it can also result in teachers “becoming isolated and unaware of the latest educational trends.” As one respondent noted, “I have an excellent employment situation. I find it very rewarding, but somewhat professionally isolated.” The limited funding provided to First Nations schools also means that teachers are not always able to attend conferences or workshops because the school cannot afford for them to do so, and four survey respondents indicated that an important area of support would include a greater opportunity to attend workshops. Two other survey respondents suggested the usefulness of a teachers fair, where teachers could exchange ideas, look at newly published materials, meet publishers, and attend some workshops on specific subject materials such as science, social studies, art, and math. An additional suggestion included an increase in “inter-school events.”

### Encouraging Family and Community Involvement

Ten survey respondents also referred to the challenge of encouraging more parental involvement and ensuring that the school and students are shown support from parents and the community. Several people commented that a lack of home support for reading and math practice slows progress, and is very frustrating. Related to the issue of parental support for students, five survey respondents highlighted irregular school attendance as a significant problem, and poor nutrition and hygiene were also mentioned by several teachers. When asked about possible areas of support, several survey respondents mentioned the importance of workshops for parents related to good parenting and nutrition.

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Other respondents noted the important of finding ways to help parents to understand the importance of homework, particularly reading to their children from a young age, and “helping parents view reading as a pleasure, rather than a chore.”

Another area raised for concern was the increasing disclosures regarding abuse, particularly given that teacher training programs do not include any focus in this area of responsibility. One respondent, for example, stated that “in our school, the escalating numbers of cases that require front-line intervention takes a great toll on our staff.” In response, one survey respondent identified the need for professional development in crisis counseling and intervention for disclosures of abuse and students at-risk.

In addition, many of the survey respondents made reference to general difficulties in First Nations communities as a significant challenge in terms of the education of their students and their work in general. For example, more than one respondent noted that there are fewer good role models in isolated communities. Two survey respondents specifically identified this issue as key in terms of providing teachers more support, noting that “role models can teach so much in such a short period of time and their impact can last a lifetime,” and “having responsible Elders who are role models in the community join some classes regularly would help students have more pride in their culture.”

In addition, the personal problems of some students were said to make it “difficult for staff to cope, not to mention foster learning.” Many communities, it was suggested, could benefit from more counselors, including drug and addictions counselors, and a student drop in centre for evenings was also noted as a possible source of support. Several of the survey respondents therefore identified the need

to increase community support and “community understanding about what is needed to make educational programs useful and beneficial to the success of children.” They also highlighted the need for better communications between parents, doctors, nurses, and the school, and more inter-agency support for parents, such as parent support groups, parenting skills training, and family counseling. As one respondent noted:

In some First Nations communities there seems to be great value placed on education and the success of children. Unfortunately, in others this priority isn't the same and ultimately the kids will suffer. The problems in the schools are not solely the schools'. The entire situation needs to be addressed. There are many gaps in services, and attitudes toward school and education are often negative.

While the need to separate education and politics was raised as an important issue by several survey respondents, it was also noted that having the Band Council support the school and education can be a very important factor in overcoming many challenges that exist.

The poor self-esteem of some First Nations students was seen as the basis for many challenges the teachers face. One respondent noted that “building self-esteem is not easy when historically our students carry generations of abuse.” However, many irregularities in behaviour were said to stem from low self-esteem, including poor relationships with teachers. Three survey respondents specifically identified a lack of respect from students for themselves and teachers as very frustrating. For example, one teacher stated that “I have had a difficult time with the lack of respect of many students. It can be very discouraging to be the brunt of young children's anger. I have learned not to take things personally.”

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A lack of self-esteem on the part of some students was identified as a problem that must be overcome, and it was also noted that “all students should be expected to reach acceptable grade standards because THEY CAN.”

## **Suggested Resources and Support for Teachers Who Are New to First Nations Schools**

The survey ended with a request that teachers suggest any specific areas of support or resources that would assist teachers who are new to First Nations schools enjoy a positive employment experience. Several of the survey respondents offered suggestions for the teachers themselves, encouraging them to “be open-minded to learning and respectful of a valuable culture,” “get to know the people, make home visits, and attend community gatherings,” “involve parents and families in fieldtrip decisions,” and “have community members visit the classroom to share their stories or act as role models.” As one respondent commented, new teachers must:

Realize that your work at school is only part of the job. The one-on-one situations after school is where much of the real “living skills” are taught. Be prepared to be an integral part of the community and involved in extra-curricular activities.

### **Mentoring Opportunities**

Seven of the survey respondents also highlighted the importance of mentorship with an experienced teacher. The establishment of mentor relationships, as mentioned above, may be difficult given the high rates of turn-over and large proportion of new teachers in First Nations schools. Possible ways to address this situation were therefore suggested, including the use of technology to create a network for teachers to dialogue with colleagues, or the hosting of a conference in the late summer for teachers to get together.

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### Knowledge of the Community

The most consistent recommendation for teachers who are new to First Nations schools, made by over two-thirds of the survey respondents, related to them having as much information as possible about the history of the area and its people prior to their arrival in the school. As one survey respondent commented:

The first thing would be to study/research the First Nations peoples you are going to be working with. Get to know and understand their culture and history. Make an effort to meet and get to know the people of the community.

An introduction to the culture would help new teachers, who also need to be aware of the history of First Nations people since contact, which will “help explain why there is sometimes a hesitation on the part of parents to get involved in their child’s school life.” Many people also suggested that new teachers make an effort to learn about the community and different community members’ gifts and skills, roles, responsibilities, including who to go to for help, information, and protocol issues. Honest, clear communication and information about lines of support and how people can or can not help were suggested as ways to help new teachers, as was an introduction to Chief and Counsellors, with the Chief presenting a list of expectations and goals, both academic and social.

Specific suggestions to help new teachers understand their new surroundings were a handout that explains the intricacies of living in a small village (eg. taxi service, protocol at feasts, cultural expectations, travel agencies, transportation numbers), which could be completed by asking older teachers what was missing for them. A local orientation committee who will meet with new teachers for the purpose of orienting the teachers to the culture, heritage, and politics of the particular First Nation was also recommended. Other orientation activities could involve more

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time for new teachers to attend community/family functions, like a summer camping trip. A community potlatch to welcome new staff was also said to be a good introduction to their new positions. It was also suggested that prospective teachers may want to billet for a couple of weeks with a First Nations family before agreeing to the teaching position, so that they can see the area before accepting the job rather than simply participating in a job interview in an urban setting.

Another specific suggestion offered was:

When I started working [in a First Nations school in another province], I was given an orientation handbook which had one page essays on a variety of concerns written by teachers with First Nations teaching experience. It included their school's name and phone number in case contact was desired. I found it positive, motivating, and helpful.

Several of the survey respondents also identified the need for more teachers to be given "the opportunity to learn and experience the challenges and joys of First Nations schools during their University training (which should possibly be mandatory)," including more First Nations education courses at Universities and Colleges. Generally, the value of opportunities to work in the area of First Nations education was noted by several survey respondents, such as the individual who commented that "I believe that every new teacher should experience the hardships and joys of teaching in a First Nations school."

## Summary

This project has identified a range of issues that effect the employment and experiences of teachers in First Nations schools. Individuals are attracted to and appreciate positions within the schools for a variety of reasons, including their small size and the closeness of their teaching staffs, the learning opportunities they represent, and their challenging work environment that is personally motivating for many people. As one survey respondent so clearly stated:

I have really enjoyed working in this school, and I plan to teach here for many years to come.

The challenges that teachers face within the schools are significant. The limited resources provided to the schools mean that there is sometimes a lack of personnel, and the lack of resources available to support students with special needs is an issue of great concern to teachers in First Nations schools. The challenge of encouraging greater family involvement and more community support for and understanding of the importance of education are also significant.

In spite of these challenges, many of the First Nations teachers that participated in this study expressed feelings that are reflected in the following comment made by a survey respondent:

I enjoy learning about the culture, the beliefs, and meeting so many interesting and knowledgeable people. I especially enjoy working with the children. Because our school is not that large, it is rewarding to see my students grow up and develop. We are like a family here and all the children are our children. Everyday is an adventure and on some days being the teacher is not the main role. Working here has made me in to a stronger, more knowledgeable, and better rounded person. I am a learner and I learn something new everyday.



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First Nations schools are struggling to address many of the issues raised by teachers in this survey, and the combined efforts of school governing authorities, administrators, parents, community members, and teachers staffs will undoubtedly help to ensure that First Nations schools continue to be interesting and comfortable places for people to work. The dedication shown by teachers in First Nations schools will also be a key factor in ensuring that First Nations students are provided meaningful education opportunities, and are supported in every way possible so that they can reach their full potential.



**Survey Package  
Distributed to  
First Nations Schools**



March 2, 2000

**To: All Principals/Administrators of First Nations Schools**

**From: Barb Kavanagh  
Director of Research  
First Nations Education Steering Committee**

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) are currently conducting research to gain a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of teachers in First Nations schools. This research is intended to provide information about why teachers are attracted to First Nations schools, as well as any appropriate ways to support teachers so that they have positive experiences working in the schools.

Please find attached a cover letter and survey for teachers in First Nations schools. *We would appreciate it if you would distribute a copy to each of your teachers and offer them an opportunity to complete the survey and return it directly to the FNESC/FNSA office.*

Participation in this project is of course voluntary, and all responses will remain completely confidential. All of the information provided will be reported in a general way, and no individuals or schools will be identified in the project outcomes. The information being collected is simply intended to provide a better understanding of the general issues associated with teaching in First Nations schools, and to identify any ways to promote the schools as providing positive employment opportunities to new and continuing teachers.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the attached survey, please do not hesitate to telephone me at any time at (604) 925 – 6087.

Yours Sincerely,

Barb Kavanagh

March 2, 2000

**To: All Teachers in First Nations Schools**

**From: Barb Kavanagh  
Director of Research  
First Nations Education Steering Committee**

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) are currently conducting research to gain a better understanding of the characteristics and needs of teachers in First Nations schools. This research is intended to provide information about why teachers are attracted to First Nations schools, as well as any appropriate ways to support teachers so that they have positive experiences working in the schools.

*We would appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the attached survey and return it directly to the FNESC/FNSEA office by March 31, 2000, fax number (604) 925 - 6097.*

Participation in this project is of course voluntary, and all responses will remain completely confidential. All of the information provided will be reported in a general way, and no individuals or schools will be identified in the project outcomes. The information being collected is simply intended to provide a better understanding of the general issues associated with teaching in First Nations schools, and to identify any ways to promote the schools as providing positive employment opportunities to new and continuing teachers.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the attached survey, please do not hesitate to telephone me at any time at (604) 925 - 6087.

Yours Sincerely,

Barb Kavanagh

## Informational Survey

How long have you been teaching in your present school? \_\_\_\_\_ year(s)

Did you teach in a different First Nations school prior to your current position?    yes      
no   

Prior to teaching in **any** First Nations school, how long had you been teaching? \_\_\_\_\_ year(s)

What factors first attracted you to teaching in a First Nations school?  
(please add additional pages if required)

Based upon your experience, are there any aspects of First Nations schools that make them particularly comfortable/professionally stimulating/enjoyable places to work? Please describe.  
(please add additional pages if required)

Based upon your experience, are there any aspects of working in First Nations schools that present specific challenges, either professionally or personally? Please describe.  
(please add additional pages if required)

Can you suggest any resources/support that would make your employment situation more comfortable/professionally stimulating/enjoyable? Please describe.  
(please add additional pages if required)



Can you suggest any resources/support for teachers who are **new** to First Nations schools that would make their orientation/new employment experience more comfortable/professionally stimulating/enjoyable? Please describe.

(please add additional pages if required)

Please feel free to add any additional comments related to your experience teaching in a First Nations school(s). In particular, please feel free to offer any suggestions for future FNSEA research/activities to assist teachers in First Nations schools.

(please add additional pages if required)

**Please return completed surveys to:**  
**The First Nations Education Steering Committee/First Nations Schools Association**  
**Suite 707 – 100 Park Royal South West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2**  
**fax: (604) 925 - 6097**

