

FINAL REPORT

Making the Jump: Aboriginal Student Transitions from K-12 to Post-Secondary

Coast Coal Harbour Hotel

Vancouver, BC

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Submitted by

The First Nations Education Steering Committee

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Making the Jump Final Report:

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Making the Jump Final Report

Executive Summary

On October 3, 2013, seventy-five people came together to participate in an event titled: *Making the Jump: Aboriginal Student Transitions from K-12 to Post-Secondary Forum*, hosted by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) with support from the BC Ministry of Advanced Education.

While the number of Aboriginal learners enrolled in post-secondary education in BC is growing each year, Aboriginal students are not transitioning to post-secondary education at the same rate as their non-Aboriginal peers. The transition rates are especially low for male Aboriginal students and children in care. Improving Aboriginal student transition rates is therefore a key priority, and the October 3 Forum was intended to gather input from students and community members and share leading practices in supporting transitions, while identifying new initiatives to support career and academic planning for Aboriginal students.

In order to gather as much input as possible from everyone who attended the Forum, a comprehensive feedback workbook was provided to each of the participants. The following report highlights the comments and thoughts that were shared through those workbooks, with accompanying findings of a literature review conducted to identify research and promising practices related to the forum themes.

Summary of Feedback Gathered Through the Forum Workbooks

Background

The need for greater educational attainment for Aboriginal¹ learners in Canada is well-recognized and supported by a range of evidence. The correlation between better education, better jobs, and better income has been substantially documented. Higher levels of education are known to improve socio-economic status and result in better health and greater life satisfaction. Further, increasing the number of Aboriginal people with post-secondary education (PSE) would not only benefit individuals, their families, and their communities; it also would address Canada's labour force challenges and improve the economy. Further, Aboriginal students – and their families – clearly hold out great hope for their futures, and they recognize that greater educational success is the key to help them reach their dreams.

¹ While recognizing and respecting the diversity within First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, for ease of reference and the focus of the October 2013 Forum, this report uses the term Aboriginal unless reference is being made to data or information that is specific to one group only.

However, evidence shows that there is a marked disconnect between the career aspirations of Aboriginal young people and their actual labour market participation rates, suggesting that their ability to attain their goals is being limited – undoubtedly in large part by low educational attainment rates. In the current information and technology-based economy, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient as a terminal degree. Most of the fastest growing jobs that pay reasonably well require at least some PSE. But due to what is often characterized as a “leaky educational pipeline,” too many students fail to complete high school and make a successful transition to PSE, and to the associated stable, meaningful careers the students desire.

The participants at the 2013 Aboriginal Student Transitions Forum were asked a number of questions to contribute to a better understanding of why more Aboriginal students are not making effective transitions to post-secondary education, as well as how this problem can best be addressed.

Summary of Feedback

What barriers do students face in education, generally? What do think are the main challenges students face in transitioning to higher education?

- Inadequate preparation at the K-12 level
- Challenges related to disconnectedness
- Financial barriers

What supports are needed to ensure effective student transitions?

- Early exposure of students to post-secondary options and post-secondary environments
- Better counselling and interventions with high school students
- Ongoing, pro-active encouragement for Aboriginal students
- Welcoming, inclusive post-secondary environments
- Enhanced financial support

What specific supports would assist male students and children in care?

- Targeted initiatives and special efforts for specific populations of students
- Pro-active encouragement and care directed at boys and children at risk

Do you know examples of community efforts that are increasing the number of successful student transitions?

- A strong foundation for education within the community
- Specific activities to expose students to a variety of school and career options and requirements
- Stronger connections between communities, school districts and post-secondary institutions
- Community-based PSE delivery
- Financial assistance

What else should we be doing as communities to ensure greater student access to higher education and retention?

- More outreach support systems to keep students connected to their communities and families
- More Aboriginal designated spaces, broader cultural awareness, and stronger counselling

What funding issues do students and communities face?

- Significant poverty
- A Post-Secondary Student Support Program that does not meet the demand for or increasing costs of tuition and living expenses
- Inadequate and unsustainable funding for higher learning programs and institutions on reserve

Do you know of other promising practices that are improving student transitions?

- More stakeholders recognizing the need for better communication
- Better integration of Aboriginal content throughout the curriculum
- Greater focus on academic skills and improved instruction
- Elders in Residence, Aboriginal gathering places, and mentoring and advice for PSE students

What else can institutes/programs do to ensure greater student success? What else should we be doing to address successful transitions?

- More effective information sharing
- Stronger preparation at high school
- Supports for students who are enrolled in post-secondary institutes

Conclusions and Themes

As highlighted in the October 2013 Aboriginal Student Transitions Forum and in the relevant literature reviewed in this report, there are numerous barriers that are still preventing the levels of Aboriginal student success that are needed. However, there is also reason for optimism.

Widespread efforts are being made to address the multi-dimensional needs of Aboriginal students at all levels of the education system, and important progress is being made. Aboriginal communities are making concerted and effective efforts to promote increased levels of student success. More and more partnerships are being established by Aboriginal communities and educational settings and mainstream education partners. Aboriginal perspectives are being increasingly infused into educational curricula at the elementary and secondary levels. Aboriginal graduation rates in BC's public schools are rising. Post-secondary institutes are undertaking critical efforts to make their campuses more inviting for Aboriginal learners and more reflective of their needs, values, and realities. And successes are being achieved as a result.

Specifically, the following themes were raised in the feedback provided by the Forum participants, along with the supporting evidence from existing literature and research reports.

Local answers are the most effective

Fundamentally, Aboriginal youth should not be viewed as a homogeneous population. Therefore, all issues and possible responses should be explored locally, with the Aboriginal students and communities involved. Additionally, the numerous barriers to Aboriginal students' transitions and retention do not lend themselves to a one-dimensional approach. Instead, a combination of collaborative efforts by Aboriginal communities and all levels of the education system are needed.

Better academic preparation and higher expectations are needed at the K-12 level

Interventions must begin early, when students are first developing their PSE and career aspirations, and attention must be provided in time to ensure that Aboriginal students pass key "gatekeeper courses," such as academically rigorous courses at the grade nine level. Students must understand the importance of careful educational and career planning, high school curricula must be rigorous, relevant, engaging, and culturally appropriate, and efforts must be made to meaningfully engage parents and communities. Overall, there must be widely held, higher expectations for Aboriginal students, so that they are provided every opportunity to graduate with the skills and credentials they require for further study and meaningful career options.

Aboriginal elementary and secondary students and their families should receive thorough and relevant counselling, information, and exposure to PSE and career possibilities

Secondary schools can provide specific supports to complement students' academic preparation, including: early and ongoing counselling; opportunities for students and families to become aware of academic requirements for PSE entrance; and career planning initiatives that are integrated into the school curriculum, rather than offered as add-on activities. Additionally, career planning and PSE promotional and recruitment efforts and materials must be relevant to Aboriginal students, with an emphasis on personal and direct contact and, whenever possible, involving mentoring opportunities and Aboriginal role models.

In addition, personal counselling should be available to prepare Aboriginal students for the tensions and conflicts associated with the change of environment and expectations of higher education, and there is a need for greater awareness of PSE costs and financing options. Also, the potential benefits of encouraging Aboriginal students to take part in extra-curricular activities should be considered, including the need for financial support to make this possible – especially for children in care.

Communities can implement efforts to build student resilience and family capacity

Associated with improved support activities in schools, Aboriginal communities can assist students and families, and can play a key role in helping students develop a strong 'sense of self' as an Aboriginal person. These efforts can build from the understanding that feelings of responsibility to

and support from family and community motivate many Aboriginal students to engage in higher education.

Stronger connections between high schools and post-secondary institutions are needed

All components of the education system have an interconnected role to play in addressing barriers for Aboriginal students, rendering conventional, fragmented approaches unlikely to succeed. Joint planning and strong relationships between high schools and higher learning institutions are very useful, and there should be cooperative efforts to raise awareness about possible opportunities for prospective PSE students. Also, in implementing initiatives to connect secondary and post-secondary students and education settings, consideration should be given to the provision of financial support for students who could not otherwise afford to participate in orientation programs and activities, and for students who do take advantage of support activities and then cannot afford to proceed further with their educations.

Connections with communities are a practical and moral imperative

In addition to connections between post-secondary institutions and schools, there is also a need for stronger partnerships between higher learning settings and communities, building upon the rights and responsibilities of families and communities for the education of their people. Educational institutions and communities can develop and sustain formal and informal partnerships for outreach, access, and retention, resulting in local approaches that take into account the priorities and circumstances of communities and the strengths of each institution. Post-secondary institutes should invest adequate time, energy and resources for trust-building and the establishment of respectful relationships.

Initiatives should open doors to more students

Careful consideration should be given to more flexible and creative admissions practices, as new approaches may encourage and capture a broader range of students, including those who do and do not meet the conventional admissions criteria. Collaborative discussions about possible changes are important, however, to ensure an appropriate balance between flexibility and relevant criteria that will ensure student success. Specific supports are also needed for Aboriginal students who require upgrading and orientation in order to meet post-secondary demands and requirements. Accordingly, bridging programs are seen as critical to student success, especially when those programs are well connected to other initiatives in the institution.

Relevant course content in post-secondary is a priority

Aboriginal students will seek out and subsequently remain at post-secondary settings that they perceive as relevant and reflective of their realities and values. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that course materials are culturally relevant and sensitive, as students need to find a personal connection to the curriculum.

An emphasis on professional development for instructors and institute staff would be beneficial

There is a need for all university teaching staff to engage in professional development workshops to enhance their awareness of Aboriginal history and cultures, as greater understandings can enhance class discussions and promote classes and environments that are more respectful of all students. Further, in considering professional development requirements, it is important to acknowledge and address potential resistance directly.

Local delivery can have significant benefits

Local delivery of post-secondary opportunities through Aboriginal controlled institutes has been highlighted as a critical component of efforts to promote improved Aboriginal student transition and retention rates. However, the majority of Aboriginal institutes are struggling for recognition of and funding for the important work they do. This problem must be addressed collaboratively. In addition, their respective strengths and unique contributions suggest that cooperation between Aboriginal and mainstream educators and institutions will be essential.

In the absence of an Aboriginal-controlled institute, it can be very beneficial when public post-secondary institutes and Aboriginal communities collaborate to offer programs locally.

Aboriginal Student Centres

Both the Forum participants and relevant literature highlight the importance of dedicated spaces for Aboriginal learners, particularly when those spaces offer counselling and a range of other services, events, and supports. The matter of appropriate involvement in the Centres and participation of Aboriginal students in the broader post-secondary setting is a topic that should be discussed locally, based upon the perspectives of the Aboriginal communities and students being served, but it does appear to be an issue worthy of consideration.

Support services

Whether in addition to, or facilitated by, Aboriginal Student Centres, there is unanimous agreement that support for Aboriginal students is essential for their success. A holistic range of support activities should consider the whole of students' lives, including their academic, cultural, spiritual, personal, and financial needs.

Addressing financial challenges

As stated by the Forum participants, in considering barriers to Aboriginal student transitions, "above everything else is funding insufficiency." Unless this issue is resolved, many Aboriginal students will continue to struggle to make a successful transition to PSE and the subsequent careers made possible through their higher learning experience.

Additional Important Considerations

- In addition to the broad considerations outlined in this paper, there is a need for specific focus on Aboriginal male students and children in care. Generally, the Forum participants and the relevant literature seem to suggest that these students require the same types of support as those recommended for all Aboriginal students, but targeted with a specific emphasis on these populations of students.
- The factors outlined in this paper must be supported by systemic change, as opposed to only add-on programs. Sustained progress will require the intentional commitment of institution governing bodies and senior administrations to embed their support of Aboriginal education within the institutional structure, strategic plan, and budget.
- Programs do not have to be wide in scope to have a noticeable impact. Meeting a specific need of an identifiable population can have a meaningful result in terms of transitions and retention.
- Programs that enlist the support of Elders are reported to be particularly successful, including initiatives that take place in K-12 schools, on campus, or in communities.

Making the Jump: Aboriginal Student Transitions from K-12 to Post-Secondary FINAL REPORT

On October 3, 2013, seventy-five people came together to participate in an event titled: Making the Jump Aboriginal Student Transitions from K-12 to Post-Secondary Forum, hosted by the First Nations Education Steering Committee with support from the BC Ministry of Advanced Education.

While the number of Aboriginal learners enrolled in post-secondary education in BC is growing each year, Aboriginal students are not transitioning to post-secondary education at the same rate as their non-Aboriginal peers. The transition rates are especially low for male Aboriginal students and children in care.

Improving Aboriginal student transition rates is a key priority, as recognized in the Ministry of Advanced Education's *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan, 2020 Vision for the Future*.

Goal 4: Aboriginal learners transition seamlessly from K-12 to post-secondary education.

The 2020 Vision for the Future framework sets out a number of specific objectives related to this goal and calls upon partners from across the system to take action to address the barriers facing Aboriginal students and support their transitions into post-secondary education.

The October 3 Forum was intended to gather input from students and community members and share leading practices in supporting transitions, while identifying new initiatives to support career and academic planning for Aboriginal students. The Forum also provided an opportunity to engage representatives of public post-secondary institutes, key Aboriginal organizations, and other post-secondary partners.

In order to gather as much input as possible from everyone who attended the Forum, a comprehensive feedback workbook was provided to each of the participants. The following report highlights the comments and thoughts that were shared through those workbooks, with accompanying findings of a literature review conducted to identify research related to student transitions.

About the First Nations Education Steering Committee

The event host, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), was founded in 1992 as a First Nations-controlled organization dedicated to advancing quality First Nations education in BC. FNESC is led by a Board of 105 First Nations community representatives. Other First Nations representatives participate on subcommittees dedicated to post-secondary education, First Nations languages, and Local Education Agreements.

FNESC works at the provincial level to provide services in the areas of research, communications, information sharing, advocacy, program administration and networking. The organization strives to build partnerships with federal and provincial government agencies and other relevant stakeholders in order to communicate the issues identified by BC First Nations and ensure that they are meaningfully addressed.

With its partner organizations, the First Nations Schools Association and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, FNESC is working to build a strong and effective BC First Nations Education System.

Forum Agenda

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| 7:30 am | Breakfast |
| 8:30 am | Welcome and Recognition of the Territory, Larry Grant, Musqueam Nation Elder |
| 8:45 am | Opening Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deborah Jeffrey, Executive Director, First Nations Education Steering Committee <p><i>Event Chairs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deborah Hull, Executive Director, Teaching Universities, Institutes and Aboriginal Programs• DeDe DeRose, Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement, Ministry of Education |
| 9:00 am | Panel 1: Student Voices <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emily Cunningham, Mark R. Isfeld Secondary• Wesley Harris, South Hill Adult Education Centre• Jessica Humchitt, Simon Fraser University• Jeane Riley, University of British Columbia |
| 10:00 am | Break |

- 10:15 am Panel 2: Community Voices
- Hilistis Pauline Waterfall, Matriarch, Heiltsuk Nation
 - Aanatwoqwees Valerie Adrian, Parent/Grandparent, St'at'imc Nation (Xwisten)
 - April Shopland, Aboriginal Home/School Support Worker, G.P. Vanier Secondary (SD #71)
 - Lauren Terbasket, Education Director, En'owkin Centre
 - Tammy Thomas, Director of Education, Neskonlith Band
- 11:15 am Small Group Discussion and Feedback Workbooks
- 12:00 pm Lunch (provided)
- 12:45 pm Panel 3: Promising Practices
- Melania Alvarez, BC Education Coordinator, Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences/Outreach Coordinator, Mathematics Department, UBC
 - Cyndi Bonn, Trades Program Coordinator, Chalo School
 - Debbie Leighton Stephens, District Principal – Aboriginal Education, SD #52
 - Janet Sinclair, Aboriginal Student Transition Advisor, Vancouver Island University
- 2:00 pm Break
- 2:15 pm Panel 4: Promising Practices
- Vernie Clement, Aboriginal Mentor and Community Coordinator, Thompson Rivers University
 - Diane Janzen, Education Manager, Seabird Island Band
 - Nathan Matthew, Executive Director, Aboriginal Education, Thompson Rivers University
 - Kendra Underwood, Director, Saanich Adult Education Centre
- 3:30 pm Small Group Discussion and Feedback Workbooks
- 4:00 pm Closing Comments
- 4:30 pm End of the Day and Evaluation Prize Draw

Larry Grant, Elder, Musqueam Nation

Mr. Grant is an Elder from the Musqueam First Nation in Vancouver. He is an Adjunct Professor in the University of British Columbia First Nations Languages Program, a Language and Culture Consultant for Musqueam First Nation, and the Resident Elder for the First Nations House of Learning at UBC.

Event Chairs

DeDe DeRose is the Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement with the BC Ministry of Education and Chair of the K-12 Aboriginal Education Partners. She is a member of the Esketemc Nation, located near Williams Lake. DeDe graduated from the Native Indian Teacher Education Program in 1981 and taught in the Cariboo-Chilcotin for 9 years before returning to the University of BC to get a diploma and Master of Education in 1993. DeDe worked for two years in the Aboriginal Education Branch before accepting an elementary principalship in the Kamloops/Thompson School District where she was a principal for 19 years. She served on the former BC College of Teachers for 8 years and has chaired the UBC First Nations Education Council for 12 years.

DeDe is married and the proud mother of two sons, one stepson, three daughters-in-laws and Kye7e to two wonderful *imch* (grandchildren). Her favourite retreat location is her cabin on her traditional territory at Kokanee Bay in Lac La Hache.

Deborah Hull is the Executive Director, Northern/Central Region for the Ministry of Advanced Education. In that position, she is responsible for Aboriginal post-secondary education and training policy and programs. Deborah joined the Ministry in 1998 and since then has held various leadership positions in the Ministry of Advanced Education, as well as the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, and the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat. Deborah has a law degree from the University of Victoria. She has two children – one who has recently transitioned into post-secondary education, and one who will be doing so in a few years.

Panel 1: Student Voices

The Student Voices panellists shared their experiences as students and described successes and challenges in their education journeys.

Emily Cunningham (Cree) is a 17-year-old student at Mark R. Isfeld Secondary. She was born in Campbell River and has spent most of her life in the Comox Valley. Her interests lie in fine arts and criminology, which she studies at North Island College in the evenings.

Wesley Harris is a 17 year old student at South Hill Adult Education Centre. He previously attended Gladstone Secondary. Born and raised in East Vancouver, he attended school for a time in SD #54 (Bulkley Valley). His mother's family comes from the Ahousaht and Huu-ay-aht Nations of the Nuuchahnulth First Nations while his father comes from the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Nations. His traditional name is Huuayaht to honor his ancestry from his maternal grandfather. Wesley has two courses to finish before he graduates from high school and after graduation he plans to study carpentry at the BC Institute of Technology.

Jessica Humchitt studies health sciences at Simon Fraser University. A member of the Heiltsuk Nation and mother of three children, Jessica has won a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Undergraduate Student Research Award and completed a research internship in a neuroscience lab. After finishing her degree, she hopes to either continue with cancer research or work in policy development for maternal health care.

Jeane Riley is currently studying in the Master of Social Work program at the University of British Columbia. Jeane is a member of the Fort Nelson First Nation. She previously attended Native Education College, where she received her certificate in Family and Community Counselling. She volunteers in the Elders Program at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, and spent this last summer at the Healing Spirit Lodge, where she developed and implemented a healing program for women. She hopes to continue studying mental health issues in society and work within Aboriginal communities.

Panel 2: Community Voices

The Community Voices panellists presented initiatives to support student transitions at the community level, identifying factors influencing student success and discussing steps for moving forward.

Hilistis Pauline Waterfall is a member of the Heiltsuk Nation, a proud ambassador for her people, and an advocate of access to education for all First Nations people. For 35 years she has worked to establish adult learning centres in Bella Bella. This work has resulted in the Waglisla Adult Learning Centre, which offers adult upgrading, and Heiltsuk College, which offers post-secondary courses. These two centres have taught three generations and more than 600 Heiltsuk people. Hilistis also served as a founding member of Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association and she is a former Chair and Co-chair of the IAHLA Board. Hilistis is known as a “keeper of the knowledge” in her community and she has played a significant role in revitalizing the Hailhzaqv language. In 2010 she was a recipient of the Order of BC.

Aanatwoqwees Valerie Adrian is from Xwisten (Bridge River Band) of the St’at’imc Nation. Her mother is Fidelia Haiyupis from the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation and her father is Victor Adrian Sr. from the St’at’imc Nation. She has 7 children ages 14-35, including 5 foster children, and three grandchildren ages 6 to 8. Valerie is also a BC public education school trustee for SD #74 (Gold Trail) and an Education Coordinator for her Band. Her Education Coordinator work involves everything from HeadStart to Adult programs for Xwisten.

April Shopland is a member of the K’omoks First Nation. She was the Education Co-ordinator in that community for 11 years and has spent the last 16 years as the Aboriginal Home/School Support Worker at G. P. Vanier Secondary School. She assists students in Grades 8 through 12 with academic courses, programming and post-secondary planning. April received a Master of Education Degree from Simon Fraser University in 2003.

Lauren Terbasket is from the Okanagan Nation and a member of the Lower Similkameen Band. She is a candidate for a master’s degree in Leadership and Training at Royal Roads University. Lauren has extensive experience in Aboriginal education including both curriculum development and teaching, cultural community development, and environmental conservation. She has been involved through the En’owkin Centre in the development and delivery of accredited public post-secondary programming, focused on Syilx social, institutional and environmental perspectives.

Tammy Thomas is a Neskonlith Band member from the community of Salmon Arm and the mother of 2 girls. Her education background is in Aboriginal Human Services, Psychology and Counselling. She has worked for over 17 years as an employee of the Neskonlith Education Department, advancing to the position of Director of Education and Daycare. As the Director of Education, she has advocated on behalf of her people at many levels. Tammy currently represents Neskonlith as a FNEESC Board and FNEESC Post-Secondary Subcommittee member.

Panel 3: Promising Practices

The Promising Practices panellists presented initiatives to support student transitions at the institutional level, identifying barriers and opportunities for student success and providing suggestions for increasing the number of Aboriginal students successfully transitioning to post-secondary education and training.

Melania Alvarez is the BC Education Coordinator for the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS) and Outreach Coordinator for the UBC Mathematics Department. Melania obtained her Bachelor degree in actuarial science from the National University of Mexico, a Master's of Science in Operations Research from Stanford University, and a Master's of Science in Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently she is preparing a dissertation for a PhD in mathematics education at Simon Fraser University. She was the recipient of the 2012 Adrien Pouliot Award from the Canadian Mathematical Society in recognition of her contributions to mathematics education in Canada.

Cyndi Bonn is Dene from Treaty 8 Territory, Fort Nelson First Nation. Cyndi works with Chalo School and the Fort Nelson First Nation as the Trades Program Coordinator, providing direct support to student apprentices and coordinating trades training programs. She has a business background, with over 20 years of experience working in First Nations administration in the Syilx and Nlaka'pamux communities of the Nicola Valley. Cyndi returned home to Fort Nelson three years ago, with her two small children, ages 6 and 8, who attend Chalo School, and she was instrumental in the establishment of the Chalo Trades Centre; a training facility that houses two classrooms and 1600 sq ft of workshop space in Fort Nelson First Nation.

Debbie Leighton Stephens is the District Principal for Aboriginal Education in SD #52 (Prince Rupert). She is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation and her home community is Metlakatla, BC. Over the years Debbie has worked as an elementary classroom teacher, a SFU Faculty Associate, the Sm'algayax Program Coordinator and the Department Head for First Nations Education Services in the Prince Rupert School District. She has a professional teaching certificate, a General Studies Degree and a Master's degree in First Nations education.

Janet Sinclair is the Aboriginal Student Transition Advisor and Program Chair of the Aboriginal University Bridging Program at Vancouver Island University. Janet has ancestry from Tutchone Nation, Yukon and Scotland. She has been supporting students in higher education for over 20 years.

Panel 4: Promising Practices

Vernie Clement belongs to the Lhoosk'uz Dene and is Dakelh. He was raised by his grandmother first in Tl'esqox (a Tsilhqot'in community), and then moved to the isolated community of Lheyidli (Kluskus IR#14). After moving to Kamloops, he graduated from Norkam Secondary and continued on to University College of the Cariboo (now TRU). Vernie is responsible for the Aboriginal Mentor Program,

which was designed to assist new students (1st and 2nd year) with a successful transition into university. In the program, mentoring can happen in different forms (One-to-one, groups, events, workshops, etc.) and is based on individual student needs.

Diane Janzen is the Education Manager for the Seabird Island Band and owner of Janzen and Associates, a Chilliwack-based management consulting firm. Diane has been an active community member over the years including two terms as school trustee, two years as Chair of the Chilliwack School Board, one term as Chilliwack City Councillor, and as a volunteer with a wide range of organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Ann Davis Transition Society, Chilliwack Community Services, Chilliwack Rotary Club, Chilliwack Stingrays Swim Club and Yarrow Ratepayers Association. Diane has a passion for education and healthcare and is known and respected for her practical approach in seeking solutions as well as her focus on results.

Nathan Matthew is an advisor to the First Nations Education Steering Committee and a professional educator with a master's degree in education. He served 17 years as Chief of the Simpcw First Nation. For several years he has been actively negotiating and advising to advance the BC First Nations education jurisdiction agreements and to support the growth of quality First Nations education. Under his leadership, the first Aboriginal Education Improvement Agreement was developed and implemented in the province of BC. He has had leadership and advisory roles in a number of organizations, including the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, New Relationship Trust, and School District #73 First Nations Education Council. He currently holds the position of Executive Director, Aboriginal Education, Thompson Rivers University. Chief Nathan Matthew lives in Barriere, British Columbia.

Kendra Underwood is a First Nations adult educator from Tsawout First Nation, currently enrolled in the St. Francis Xavier University Masters of Adult Education program. For the past five years, Kendra has worked as the Director of the Saanich Adult Education Centre, which is part of a larger organization, the W̱SÁNEĆ School Board, located on Tsartlip territory in Brentwood Bay. The SAEC offers numerous courses and programs to serve the local community including early literacy, adult upgrading, and post-secondary programming. In addition to her role with the SAEC, she sits on the FNEESC Board of Directors as its Vice-President.

Summary of Feedback Gathered Through the Forum Workbooks

The failure must not continue. We cannot lose another generation to poverty and despair.

Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, National Chief, Assembly of First Nations, cited in Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011

Canada cannot and need not allow yet another generation of Indigenous citizens to languish in poverty. Indigenous children trail the rest of Canada's children on practically every measure of wellbeing: family income, educational attainment, poor water quality, infant mortality, health, suicide, crowding and homelessness. The failure of ongoing policies is clear. ... Failure to act will result in a more difficult, less productive, and shorter life for Indigenous children. The choice is ours.

Macdonald D. and D. Wilson. 2013, June. *Poverty or Prosperity. Indigenous Children in Canada.*

Background

The need for greater educational attainment for Aboriginal² learners in Canada is well-recognized and supported by a range of evidence. Aboriginal people represent a large, growing, and socio-economically disadvantaged population, which is a concern in terms of individual well-being, community development and capacity building efforts, as well as overall national and provincial productivity.

Education has been identified as a key factor in addressing the challenges that exist. The correlation between better education, better jobs, and better income has been substantially documented. Higher levels of education are known to improve socio-economic status. People with more education tend to be in better health, enjoy greater life satisfaction, and they are generally more active in civic participation (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2011).

Further, increasing the number of Aboriginal people with post-secondary education (PSE) would not only benefit individuals, their families, and their communities; it also would address Canada's labour force challenges and improve the economy. As described by MacDonald and Wilson (2013), at a time when workforce replacement and skilled labour shortages occupy the attention of both business and government alike, the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the country struggles in poverty. Almost half (48%) of Aboriginal people are under the age of 25, and the

² While recognizing and respecting the diversity within First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, for ease of reference and the focus of the October 2013 Forum, this report uses the term Aboriginal unless reference is being made to data or information that is specific to one group only.

population is growing six times faster than the non-Aboriginal population. More and more Aboriginal youth soon will be maturing and entering the workforce, and “equipping them with the tools for success — or withholding those tools — will determine either the contribution or the costs associated with young Indigenous populations seeking work as adults” (MacDonald and Wilson, 2013).

This issue is summarized by Kachuck Rosenbluth (2011) as follows.

It is ironic, if not perverse, that just as Canadians are becoming increasingly concerned about future labour shortages, there is a large and growing population of young Aboriginal people who could be an invaluable source of workers. ... Nevertheless, they are not as engaged in the workforce as they might be because they lack the required education.

This “social and economic imperative” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011, p. 5) suggests a need to strengthen existing policies and programs to better support Aboriginal youth in their transition into higher education and on to employment.

All of the issues described above are emphasized in the *2012 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education:

British Columbia faces a decade of economic change, with over a million new job openings anticipated. Due to changing demographics, a shortage of newly trained skilled workers in British Columbia’s labour market is anticipated. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are the fastest growing segment of British Columbia’s population. Investing in post-secondary education and training for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples will help address forecast labour market shortages, position Aboriginal British Columbians to take advantage of the economic opportunities that exist in the province, and enhance their participation in the social, cultural and economic life of their communities, the province and global society. The benefits of post-secondary education accrue to individuals, communities and society, and are associated with better labour market outcomes, better health outcomes, better outcomes for children, lower crime rates, and higher levels of civic participation.

In addition to the advantages highlighted by numerous researchers and commentators, Aboriginal young people themselves have career ambitions that will require much greater levels of educational success. A literature review published by the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC; Bruce and Marlin, 2012) cites evidence that “Canadian Aboriginal youth aspire to productive and fulfilling careers and are generally optimistic about their futures.” Aboriginal youth involved in the Bruce and Marlin (2012) study demonstrated a high interest in professional careers and a low interest in trades. The number-one “dream job” among the respondents was “business owner.” The study

report additionally cites evidence that many Aboriginal people want to work in jobs that connect with their culture and provide services to their community. Aboriginal youth often obtain education in a particular field because they have recognized a need in their community, and return home after graduation with the hopes of filling that need. These young people often aspire to professions in the health, education, and business fields.

In addition, in December 2011 the Assembly of First Nations and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2012) partnered to hold a webinar conversation with Aboriginal youth that was designed to get a better understanding of what could be done to attract and retain more young Aboriginal high school students in post-secondary institutions. The virtual dialogue demonstrated that the next generation of Aboriginal people in Canada is ambitious and innovative, and has a strong desire to improve their lives and their communities through better educational success, including higher learning. Students particularly emphasized that the accomplishments they achieve through studying make them, their families, and communities feel proud.

R. A. Malatest and Stonechild (2008) echo those results, citing research suggesting that the post-secondary aspirations of young Aboriginal people are similar to those of Canadian youth overall. There is also evidence to suggest that both First Nations and non-First Nations parents share similar optimism concerning their children's participation in PSE.

Aboriginal students – and their families – clearly hold out great hope for their futures, and they recognize that greater educational success is the key to help them reach their dreams.

However, evidence shows that the aspirations of Aboriginal young people do not always match actual outcomes. Hango and de Broucker (2007, cited in Bruce and Marlin, 2012) found that employed Aboriginal youth are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to belong to one of the following groups:

- high school dropouts (those who drop out of high school and enter the labour market);
- “second chancers” (those who dropped out of high school, but returned later and/or received some post-secondary training); and
- high school diploma holders (those who graduated from high school and entered the labour market directly with no PSE or training).

Analysis of data from a 2004 Youth in Transition Survey revealed that 26 per cent of the Aboriginal youth surveyed (aged 22-24) were “second chancers,” and 13 per cent were “dropouts” who had not returned to school (Looker & Thiessen, 2008 cited in Bruce and Marlin, 2012). These figures represent higher proportions than any other ethnic group in those categories. The researchers note that “the common thread here is that, of those youth who find their way to the workforce, more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal youth are likely to have left the education system early.”

This evidence shows a marked disconnect between the career aspirations of Aboriginal young people and their actual labour market participation rates, suggesting that their ability to attain their goals is being limited – undoubtedly in large part by low educational attainment rates.

Indeed, the ability of youth to access their desired careers is directly related to their educational success. Growth in Aboriginal peoples' labour force participation depends upon their ability to fill the jobs that are available, and the increasingly knowledge-based economy is raising the demand for higher skill-levels, adaptable workers, and higher levels of education among all members of the workforce. The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2011) reports that from 1990 to 2010, the number of jobs for post-secondary graduates more than doubled to 4.4 million, while for those with a high school diploma the number of jobs declined by 1.2 million.

As Bangster (2008) reports, in the current information and technology-based economy, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient as a terminal degree. Most of the fastest growing jobs that pay reasonably well require at least some PSE. However, due to what is often characterized as a "leaky educational pipeline," too many students fail to complete high school and make a successful transition to PSE, and to the associated stable, meaningful careers the students desire.

Evidence clearly demonstrates that Aboriginal students are making transitions in disproportionately low numbers, and many of the Aboriginal students who do overcome existing barriers and move on to post-secondary learning continue to face a number of difficulties and too often leave their post-secondary studies. Holmes (2005) reports evidence that PSE opportunities for Aboriginal peoples have improved considerably since the 1960s and the proportion of working-age Aboriginal peoples with trade qualifications is now close to that of the non-Aboriginal population. However, in Canada the proportion of working-age Aboriginal people with a university education still lags far behind that of the non-Aboriginal population. Holmes further notes that Aboriginal students are more likely to go to college than university, and are less likely to take college programs that prepare them for university. 2006 Census data supports this assertion, revealing that almost the same share of First Nations and non-Aboriginal people had a trades certificate (12 percent and 13 percent respectively), while only 7 percent of First Nations people had a college diploma compared to 20 percent of non-Aboriginal people, and only 7 percent of First Nations people had a university degree versus 23 percent of non-Aboriginal people (Gionet (Statistics Canada), 2009).

Bruce and Marlin (2012) also cite a variety of evidence related to post-secondary access and completion rates for Aboriginal people. Cited in that study, Maxim & White (2006) found that just over 35 per cent of Aboriginal youth covered by a Youth in Transition Survey (aged 18–20) participated in some form of PSE, as compared to approximately 54 per cent of non-Aboriginal youth. A separate study by Berger, Motte, and Parkin (2007) found that among the "class of 2003," about 65 per cent of Aboriginal high school graduates and 80 per cent of non-Aboriginal high school graduates had pursued some type of PSE.

In BC, Heslop (2009) reports that Aboriginal high school graduates are much less likely than non-Aboriginal graduates to enroll in a BC university (16 percent vs. 37 percent) or an urban college (16 percent vs. 24 percent). Aboriginal graduates are frequently under-qualified for university and are more likely than non-Aboriginal graduates to enroll in small colleges (31 percent vs. 8 percent), university colleges (29 percent vs. 25 percent), or institutes (7 percent vs. 6 percent). Program preferences of the two groups also differ.

The participants at the 2013 Aboriginal Student Transitions Forum were asked a number of questions to contribute to a better understanding of why more Aboriginal students are not making effective transitions to post-secondary education, as well as how this problem can best be addressed. Their feedback is summarized below.

Forum Feedback

Questions 1 and 2:

What barriers do students face in education, generally?

What do think are the main challenges students face in transitioning to higher education?

- *The answers to questions 1 and 2 overlapped significantly, and therefore the feedback has been captured together in one section.*

1.1 Inadequate Preparation at the K-12 Level

Many of the Forum participants commented extensively on the connection between achievement rates at the K-12 level and successful transitions to post-secondary. The comments made in this regard emphasized the problem of Aboriginal students being disproportionately placed in modified course streams, especially “if a student is initially experiencing difficulties.” The participants suggested that “Aboriginal children are stereotyped and streamed into non-academic programs,” such as “being placed in trades math and communications rather than foundation classes in grade 12,” while parents and students are not always fully aware of the consequences of these placements.

The Forum participants also highlighted the serious problem of limited literacy and numeracy rates as well as the inadequate academic skills of many Aboriginal students who leave the K-12 system. These problems leave students without the academic qualifications needed to transition and succeed at the post-secondary level, and mean that many students lack “academic confidence” because of inadequate preparation in high school. Insufficient counselling support “leaves many of our students without knowledge of or orientation to the post-secondary system, and so they are not ready” – “they lack the appropriate and necessary pre-requisites for higher education, they do not know what they want to do, and they are not prepared for post-secondary expectations.”

Overall, we are just emerging from a time in which the system itself was designed to stream Aboriginal students academically and socially.

“Casual” discrimination can be a huge barrier, such as the streaming of Aboriginal learners into remedial courses.

Too many students are leaving secondary with low literacy and numeracy levels, and a lack of study skills.

Many Aboriginal students have negative experiences in high school. They experience low expectations, they have few champions, and the system doesn’t provide ways for students to see themselves as successful learners.

Academic preparation is key. Student success in English and math is essential to success at university, but our students are pushed through K-12.

1.2 Challenges Related to Disconnectedness

In addition to the problem of inadequate preparation, the Forum participants suggested that personal challenges can prevent many students from making a transition to PSE, and can limit the success of those students who do access higher learning opportunities.

It is critical to acknowledge the tragic legacy of Canada's colonial history, and specifically the ongoing impacts of the Residential School system. Aboriginal peoples have made tremendous efforts to overcome this history and heal their Nations, but challenges continue to exist – not only at the community level, but also for individuals themselves.

Among the issues noted by the workbook respondents are students without adequate motivation to excel, unstable families, limited life skills, limited time and financial management experience, and a lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem that “make it difficult for students to approach teachers, ask for help, and face their challenges.” Additionally, many Aboriginal students may have parents and families who are unable to provide extensive support, in spite of “students’ significant obligations and personal needs.”

Further, the Forum participants suggested that due to government policies and other issues, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal students are the first in their family to consider PSE, and therefore lack mentors, role models, “people who can demonstrate a path from K-12 to post-secondary.” Added to this challenge is limited awareness – on the part of students and families – about what options are offered, what program and career choices exist, and how to access the opportunities that are available. Living far from urban centres, many students “have no opportunity to visit a post-secondary institution to gain an understanding of what they should expect.”

Also, according to the feedback gathered through the Forum workbooks, making a transition to post-secondary can be intimidating for many students, and leaving their community for school can be difficult. “Leaving a small town and leaving family and their support system, learning how to exist in the city ... that can be hard for many students.”

Moving for post-secondary can raise many practical challenges, such as finding childcare, housing, a doctor and a dentist, and accessing transportation, a driver's license, and “small things like printing.” The change of lifestyle and separation from home and culture can lead to “feelings of isolation and displacement” and can threaten students' self-identity and confidence in their chosen paths.

These challenges are compounded when students arrive at school, and even those students who make the move to post-secondary may not continue their studies for a number of reasons.

Numerous workbook respondents noted that students sometimes experience racism in post-secondary institutes, where – as one student respondent noted – there may be limited acknowledgement of the

“vibrant, resilient diversity of Indigenous nations.” Further, the racism students experience may not always be overt; the lack of understanding demonstrated by some instructors and the disconnect between students’ learning styles and general, mainstream teaching styles can make students feel removed and alienated from their learning. Curriculum and subject matter that is not relevant to Aboriginal students was also raised as a concern, compounding the overall “culture shock” and “cultural discontinuity” the students feel.

Several respondents indicated that the “huge class sizes” and the more impersonal environments at post-secondary institutes compound the students’ feelings of isolation. Many Aboriginal post-secondary students who have come from a small rural centre have moved from a “close knit reserve” to a place where they don’t know anyone, where they are a number with no individualized attention – and where they often lack the confidence and communication skills needed to ask for tutoring assistance and help.

Our students need more culturally relevant curriculum.

Post-secondary institutes may lack “a welcome face,” leaving students feeling “I am alone in my transition.”

Too many students feel isolated within the post-secondary environment without a circle of support.

The “stress” and “isolation” resulting from these issues leaves far too many Aboriginal students “not able to be fully engaged in learning” and “unable to cope with the new independence, workload, and separation from their support networks.”

1.3 Financial Barriers

In addition to the challenges identified above, a primary theme throughout the Forum feedback was financial barriers – high costs, inappropriate policies, and “above everything else is funding insufficiency.”

Too many Aboriginal students, it was reported, “are constantly worried about money.” Students do not have enough food, cannot access the transportation they need, are not able to afford reasonable housing, and lack necessary materials and supplies – especially computers and other learning supports.

I’m living in a 1 bedroom with my two children who are 9 and 15. I just purchased a Mac after two years of struggling without one.

Question 3:

What supports are needed to ensure effective student transitions?

In response to the challenges identified above, the Forum participants highlighted a number of supports that are needed to facilitate student transitions. For example, numerous references were made to the early exposure of students to post-secondary options and post-secondary environments. The workbook feedback also called for better counselling to assist students with career exploration and education planning, application processes, and access to scholarship opportunities. Related suggestions include building partnerships between high schools and post-secondary institutes in order to establish stronger relationships with students. Other suggestions include the following.

Have speakers come to high schools and outline how to achieve success in post-secondary (step by step). Give grade 8 to 12 students tools and a positive idea – “this is possible.”

We need mentoring; getting high school students together with post-secondary students to discuss the realities of what to expect.

In addition to interventions with high school students, the Forum participants also highlighted the importance of academic and personal supports for students who are making the progression to post-secondary. For example, several comments recommended summer orientations for incoming students, or tutoring and workshops on topics such as how to write a research paper. The Forum participants also raised the importance of upgrading and bridging programs for students who need preliminary support, and it was suggested that there should be more assessments of incoming students to provide any necessary early interventions.

The Forum participants emphasized the need for ongoing, pro-active encouragement for Aboriginal students. For example, it was suggested that communities and institutes should find ways to promote family support and involvement. Some comments referred to the need for individualized attention, such as “one-on-one guidance from institute support staff to help with their transition and take full advantage of their university experience” and “identify Aboriginal post-secondary advisors.” Several references were made to “student advocates” who can help students feel connected to the school community, and to the benefits that would result from Elders in Residence. Another comment suggested that “recruiters at post-secondary institutes can be the go-to-person for students as they apply and register.” One of the strongest themes in the feedback workbooks was the need to promote mentorships, peer coaching, or buddy systems. Some comments also suggested that communities and institutes build a “communication system to monitor students’ success and wellness,” creating “a supportive learning community.”

In order to facilitate more effective support, the feedback workbooks also recommended mandatory professional development for institute staff, especially to encourage more cultural awareness. For

example, the Forum participants indicated that “administrators need to make First Nations learning a priority. All instructors need to learn how to incorporate First Nations content into all classes. All instructors should have professional development about how to support Aboriginal learners and promote a more widespread understanding of Aboriginal history in Canada.”

Many of the Forum feedback workbooks emphasized the important role played by Aboriginal student centres, or Aboriginal gathering places. The comments referred to the positive role of “culturally safe spaces,” where there is a strong sense of belonging. There is also a need for practical supports that Aboriginal student spaces can offer, such as access to computers (including the Internet), printers, phones and faxes.

Not surprisingly, many references were made to the need for financial support, such as the importance of financial aid, sufficient funding, childcare, and assistance so that students can meet their basic needs – food and shelter. Given the precarious financial situation for many Aboriginal students, it was suggested that emergency contingency funding, such as the one-time support that was offered by the Ministry of Advanced Education in 2012, should be made available on an ongoing basis, as “students need extra help once in a while.”

Question 4:

What specific supports would assist male students and children in care?

In regard to male students and children in care specifically, the Forum participants appeared to be cognizant of the need for specific supports for these populations of students. However, it was suggested that more widespread awareness of the unique challenges facing specific groups of students would be beneficial; “I believe the cornerstone needs to begin in community, by establishing new awareness of the issues, creating new expectations for male students, and then developing programs and services at the community, K-12, and post-secondary levels.”

Many of the suggestions for assisting male students and children in care were similar to more general support efforts, but targeted specifically at these students. For example, it was noted that all students – including boys – need individualized attention to “understand what they are good at and better identify their pathways.” Additionally, extending the suggestions made in response to question 3, it was noted that special efforts should be made to include male guest speakers, set up boys’ groups in elementary and high school, and establish mentoring programs for young male students and talking circles with Aboriginal male Elders. It would also be useful to identify male role models who can “make it ‘cool’ for boys to be successful in school.” The responses suggested that male students would benefit from cultural programs to “ground them in their identity and give them self-esteem and self-confidence.”

Boys can be mentored by experienced former/current students.

We should have male role models speak about their struggles and how they have overcome them and what they would do differently.

Several suggestions also referred to the importance of making education relevant to male students. In particular, it was suggested that male students might benefit from work placement opportunities, strong linkages to trades programs, and job shadowing experiences.

In terms of children in care, it was suggested that it would be useful to offer trauma support, and to strongly encourage these students to participate in extra-curricular activities – including offering them fee waivers and financial support to purchase the equipment needed for involvement in sports and other activities.

Generally, the Forum participants highlighted the importance of “constant encouragement and love by whatever means necessary,” as “children in care need love, praise, early support systems to ensure they succeed in school at all levels.”

Question 5:

Do you know examples of community efforts that are increasing the number of successful student transitions? Please describe.

In discussing community efforts to increase successful transitions, the workbook respondents emphasized the importance of establishing a strong foundation for education within the community, ensuring that “education is firmly embedded in the community’s overall plan.”

The existence of First Nations K-12 schools was identified as a key example of an “effective community effort,” as they represent “communities and parents taking back responsibility for education.”

The workbook responses also identified a number of specific activities that are taking place at the community level to promote increased transitions. Visits to / tours of post-secondary institutions expose students to the various options that exist and help them learn about pre-requisites for post-secondary opportunities. Communities and schools are organizing career fairs for Aboriginal students, field trips, and celebrations of student success to recognize students’ accomplishments and encourage further efforts. Mentoring programs are being implemented, and communities and schools are using role models.

Additionally, the Forum participants indicated the value of “assisting students with pre-post-secondary evaluations and testing to ensure readiness.”

Talk to kids about college and university. Our kids currently don’t see Grade 12 as a goal, much less post-secondary.

Access to information is crucial; students must make well-informed decisions.

Family support is needed, including greater support for students with disabilities.

The Forum participants highlighted the need for stronger connections between communities and school districts, including measures to promote “accountability for educating our children so they transition seamlessly to post-sec/training.” Specifically, respondents referred to the important role of enhancement agreements, suggesting the need for “communities to build goals into their enhancement agreements that speak to transitioning to post-secondary.” One respondent indicated that “our community and school district created two employment positions – parent and student advocates. We hired community members and they are pilot positions. They work in a team approach with Aboriginal youth workers, teachers, principals, and students/parents.”

In addition, the Forum workbooks included numerous references to the importance of “bringing certificate/diploma programs to the community / more sustained support for local delivery / community-based programs and institutions.” Community delivery was seen as a way to increase success for Aboriginal students by providing a relevant, accessible, and supportive environment. Community institutes were said to be making holistic efforts to encourage Aboriginal student success, such as addressing basic needs but “combining literacy and numeracy learning with more interesting courses,” offering relevant field trips and cultural opportunities, and emphasizing Aboriginal studies. References were also made to the crucial role of Adult Basic Education programs to assist in increasing graduation and transition rates, and the benefits of collaboration between adult education programs and bridging programs – such as offering weekly Aboriginal career exploration courses, literacy level, and first year university level courses.

Aboriginal communities are also partnering with public post-secondary institutions to support student transitions, including working together to address the fact that “students need to see themselves in the institution, curricula and resources; they need to feel a place of belonging.” Activities being undertaken include, among others, weekly “check in” circles that are open to everyone so that students can be supported; visits to communities by Aboriginal advisors; Aboriginal summer science programs to facilitate exposure to higher learning settings; and Elder in Residence programs.

Also, the Forum participants made numerous references to efforts being made to address financial needs, indicating that communities are striving to offer scholarships and bursaries and ensure financial support for students during upgrading. Communities are also striving to offer students help with meals, tutoring, and childcare. However, it was noted that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) funding policies are causing some difficulties in regard to financial support for students, as there is a need for “programs, partnerships, and relationships that support students in transition over a two to three year period,” but “UCEP [University and College Entrance Program] only provides support for one year.” More flexible policies that are consistent with student realities are critical.

Question 6:**What else should we be doing as communities to ensure greater student access to higher education and retention?**

In terms of what is still needed, Forum participants suggested there should be more outreach support systems to keep students connected to their communities and families. Post-secondary recruiters and advisors could meet with students and families to plan programs and review the students' courses in comparison to requirements. It was further suggested that assistance be provided to allow families to visit post-secondary institutes, helping them to encourage their children as part of a "wrap-around support network."

The feedback workbooks also identified the need for Aboriginal designated spaces at all institutes, and the importance of advocating for more widespread cultural awareness and even stronger counselling to assist students with career selection, program options, as well as teaching students to handle stress in an unfamiliar, busy environment.

Question 7:**What funding issues do students and communities face?**

According to the feedback gathered through the Forum workbooks, Aboriginal post-secondary students face a myriad of funding challenges. Many students experience significant poverty, including challenges paying for food, shelter, and transportation. Overall, the Forum participants clearly indicated that the PSSSP [Post-Secondary Student Support Program] does not meet the demand for or increasing costs of tuition and living expenses, as AANDC's funding levels and approach have not changed in years. Numerous participants indicated that limited post-secondary funding means communities are not able to fund all students.

We need more funding for UCEP students – they seem to always be at the bottom of the waitlist.

There is never enough funding and so assistance from bursaries and scholarships is important. But our students lack knowledge of where to get funding and need assistance filling out papers. Also, not enough of our students have adequate confidence to apply.

I live off reserve and do not have a strong connection with my Band. Students like me do not know how to access funding.

PSSSP funding is insufficient for rent, food, childcare, textbooks – all the living allowance needs.

In addition to problematic AANDC guidelines, in some cases the inadequacy of funding has required communities to implement local policies that are not ideal. For example, participants suggested that policies should be more flexible to allow a longer study period, and should allow students to switch programs after the first or second year without losing funding. Generally, the funding policies do not let students “fail” safely. It is important not to cut funding when students fail a course in their first or second year; instead, they should be provided support, outreach, mentorship and counselling. Under the UCEP program, funding for upgrading is limited to one year, which in many cases is inadequate for progression into further post-secondary studies.

There is insufficient funding available for trades. This needs to change in order to help support our adult students.

Post-secondary funding is not at all adequate to support families.

Funding policies for upgrading allow limited options and do not recognize that upgrading may take more than one year.

There is too much red tape regarding appropriate “status,” and course requirements can be too rigorous for students.

Our students are graduating with high student loan debt.

Post-secondary policies set up struggling students for failure.

In addition to funding for individual students, the Forum participants highlighted the need for more adequate and sustainable funding to build and operate higher learning programs and institutions on reserve. Yet the Forum participants noted that the centralization of the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) will potentially decrease the number and limit the type of PSE programs funded in BC.

A lack of funding means we are not able to give something to recognize students. We need funds to send potential students to post-secondary institutions for a day for awareness raising and information sharing.

There is a lack of understanding from the broader BC community about why funding Aboriginal learners is fair and necessary.

AANDC limits the types of post-secondary students and programs that can be funded – not all learners and programs fit in AANDC’s box.

Question 8:

Do you know of other promising practices that are improving student transitions? Please describe.

Many of the comments offered in response to question eight echoed the feedback outlined above. The workbook respondents highlighted many positive improvements, including: the fact that more stakeholders are recognizing the need for better communication between secondary and post-secondary; better integration of Aboriginal content throughout the curriculum; more programs in K-12 that are intended to provide Aboriginal students with encouragement, mentoring, and academic skills; and increased support for K-12 teachers to improve instruction / support for Aboriginal learners early in the education process.

The responses also highlighted the value of dual-credit courses, emergency funds for struggling students, successful adult education programs, Elders in Residence, Aboriginal gathering places, and increased availability of online mentoring, which “can be a great way to connect students and those in remote areas with mentors.” Sports / coaching programs for Aboriginal athletes were also said to be potentially “life-changing.”

Additionally, the workbooks included references to Aboriginal Transition Advisors who connect with students in the community before they transition to post-secondary, peers helping one another and building supportive learning communities, and practical supports such as food, computers, and phone cards.

Community-delivered programs are being offered that reflect the jobs and opportunities available locally.

[Science camps] are a great way to encourage students and make them feel confident being away from home in a new environment and experience life on campus.

Aboriginal advisors from [the College] came and introduced themselves and talked about programs and campus life. It was personal and encouraged me to go to [the College].

Questions 9 and 10:

What else can institutes/programs do to ensure greater student success?

What else should we be doing to address successful transitions?

- *The responses to questions 9 and 10 overlapped significantly, and therefore the feedback has been captured together in one section.*

Many of the comments offered in response to questions nine and ten echoed the issues highlighted above, such as the need for more effective information sharing. Students, it was noted, should be more aware of bursaries, and “they need straightforward tips to make the application process less intimidating.” It is also important to include parents in information sharing, assisting them in understanding how to support their children through school.

The need for stronger preparation at high school was also reiterated in this section. One respondent indicated that “we must make sure students are well prepared – challenge them in high school so they know what to expect when they get on campus.” It was noted that communities need close relationships with colleges, as it is important to connect current students at post-secondary institutions with high school students. Specifically, it was suggested that “a conference for youth could allow them to hear other youth talk about their barriers and successes; we need more promotion of role models.” The suggestions in this regard also confirmed the value of supports when students are enrolled in post-secondary institutes.

It is important to encourage staff to build relationships to ensure that students ask questions and get help, which will lead to greater success; we need to teach students to access the help available to them; resources are out there and students need to know it is ok to ask for help.

We should provide free / affordable tutoring services and access to counselling, recognizing that students may feel isolated and alienated; they need support all year long.

Mentoring programs are needed for new students; help students to network together.

It is important to encourage new students to participate in campus Aboriginal events, and host social events to build a community of supports.

More relevant academic content is key.

Advise new students of what contacts and supports are available, either at or before registration, and make students feel welcome.

All institutes must have Elders in residence and a place for Aboriginal students to gather.

Other relevant comments are outlined below.

It should be mandatory for all teachers to have professional development about Indigenous history and cultural relevance.

Youth need to understand that Aboriginal Studies is an important program.

Post-secondary institutes need to report on retention so that they can be held to a relevant standard.

Colleges / universities should bring courses to communities, making it easier for students to access them. But if a program is held in the community, the institution must not “dumb down” the program.

Systemic change is needed. Institutions need to include Aboriginal people in the development of institutional goals and make these goals a part of the institutional responsibilities. They also need to make the goals operational, ensuring that the necessary resources are embedded into the budgets of each unit and department and providing increased funding to Aboriginal support services. Institutes also should partner with communities to get ideas and feedback, starting from an open and equal place.

Institutes should work closely with communities and build relationships with them – it is more than just partnering for the length of the program that you’re co-developing.

Address funding needs and AANDC funding policies.

Some institutes are offering free tuition for students who were in care. This needs to be duplicated elsewhere.

We all need to listen to students; ask them what’s working and what’s not working.

Never give up.

Question 11:

Are there things we are doing that are not effective?

The issues highlighted in response to question eleven generally repeated the feedback outlined above.

Right now the focus is solely on transitions. A successful transition should also be measured by successful graduations.

We need to stop promoting students without interventions.

We are not preparing students to be independent learners. Once they are at campus many are overwhelmed because they have to look after funds, time management and face barriers.

Requiring five courses in the first year is unrealistic for some students.

The lack of professional development for faculty on Aboriginal issues is a problem.

Too many schools are moving secondary students through the Communications 11/12 and math streams, forcing them to return to upgrade.

Streaming students (especially into a remedial area) can be really harmful. We need to support students without patronizing them or lowering their self-esteem. We need even

more institutional buy-in to support Aboriginal learners. Relationship and trust building can take time. Patience at the upper administrative level and respect for storytelling is important.

Question 12:

Additional Comments

Data and tracking are key to understanding Aboriginal enrolments. Reliable quantitative information should guide policy development.

Funds are needed to support “strengthening connections.” Indigenous recruiters should expand the recruitment circuit to rural and urban communities.

Scholarship recipients should receive laptops as incentives.

Education Coordinators should visit each student.

We should encourage programs based on demand in the labour market and employment needs in communities.

First Nations need to adjust AANDC’s funding guidelines so that they can properly assist students.

We need more networking and youth conferences.

There should be prior learning assessments for traditional and Indigenous knowledge, and credit courses that recognize Aboriginal knowledge.

We need to advocate strongly for trades programs and make them funded, because most males would like to pursue trades.

We should better prepare students prior to entry into post-secondary programs. It is very difficult to measure the success or impact of any particular transition intervention. Many of the challenges to effective transition arise prior to the arrival of Aboriginal students at post-secondary. There should be more money / support for Aboriginal institutions to help them provide transitional support.

We need advocates, champions - a person or group who is committed to making required change, to overcoming all of the objections they will face in supporting Aboriginal students and programs.

Forum Evaluation Results

	Excellent	Very Good	Satisfactory	Not Satisfactory	Poor
Overall Rating for the Event	16 (44%)	17 (48%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	
Workshop Materials (handouts...)	9 (25%)	20 (56%)	7 (19%)		
Meeting Room	17 (47%)	17 (47%)	2 (6%)		
Food	18 (50%)	16 (44%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	
	Very	Somewhat	Not at all		
Was the content relevant and valuable?	30 (83%)	5 (14%)	1 (3%)		
Were the presenters informative and able to answer your questions?	27 (75%)	9 (25%)			

Supporting Evidence / Literature Related to The Themes Identified in the Forum Feedback

Post-secondary education (PSE) is widely recognized as a powerful equalizer in Canadian society in regard to many aspects of life – from health to economic security to general well-being. Further, the post-secondary experience can be one of the most rewarding and exciting times in a young person's life. For many students, the time spent in post-secondary represents a crossroads from youth to early adulthood, and can provide an opportunity for young people to explore new directions and meet new people. But for many Aboriginal students, this positive scenario does not reflect their reality, and Aboriginal peoples in Canada are poorly represented in post-secondary institutions across the country relative to other Canadians (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011).

The reasons and possible mitigation strategies for this problem are explored below.

Part One – Identifying the Problems: Barriers to Successful Aboriginal Student Transitions

1.1 Lack of Preparation in the K-12 System

Evidence clearly supports the concerns raised by the October 2013 Forum participants, and shows that inadequate academic preparation in the K-12 education system is resulting in lower rates of high school graduation and in disproportionate numbers of First Nations students leaving the secondary system without the skills and credentials they need to succeed in PSE.

As articulated by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1996:

The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. ... The human costs of this failure are immense. It saps the creative potential of individuals, communities and nations. Yet, despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education systems, they still see education as the hope for the future, and they are determined to see education fulfill its promise.

Unfortunately, almost two decades later that description is still relevant. Numerous commentators and strong evidence supports the conclusion that inadequate achievement rates at the K-12 level are not only limiting access to higher education; they are a contributing factor to high dropout rates at colleges and universities. As noted by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science

and Technology (2011), in order to pursue PSE and succeed, Aboriginal students must complete high school and obtain the necessary knowledge and skills. However, Aboriginal drop-out rates are very high: more than 40 percent of Aboriginal people in Canada aged 20 to 24 did not have a high school diploma in 2006, compared to less than 15 percent of non-Aboriginal people in the same age group.

The challenges related to the academic preparation of students in BC's secondary schools are clearly exposed in the BC Ministry of Education's *Aboriginal Student How Are We Doing? Report for 2012/2013*. The six-year completion rate for Aboriginal students in BC is 60 percent, while for non-Aboriginal students it is 86 percent. In addition, 51 percent of Aboriginal students versus 72 percent of non-Aboriginal students graduate with a Dogwood Diploma.

Compounding the problem, too often First Nations students who **do** graduate from high school find that college and university are still beyond their reach. Literacy and numeracy rates are a serious concern for students in the public education system; Aboriginal learners show significantly lower Foundation Skills Assessment results in both numeracy and literacy in grades 4 and 7. The BC Ministry of Education's *How Are We Doing?* report shows that over five percent of Aboriginal students left high school with a school completion certificate in 2012/2013 (which is not always readily accepted for immediate post-secondary entrance), versus one percent of non-Aboriginal students. In addition, Aboriginal people in BC are very concerned about the over-representation of Aboriginal students in Alternate Programs in public schools; in 2012/2013, almost six percent of Aboriginal students in public schools in BC were enrolled in alternate programs, versus just over one percent of non-Aboriginal students.

First Nations schools in BC also face challenges in terms of raising student achievement. While the settings have proven to be particularly successful in terms of providing supportive and nurturing learning environments, and they have had a significant impact in terms of addressing student self-identity and language and culture promotion, more work remains to be done in terms of attaining consistently high levels of achievement for all learners, which hinders PSE transitions.

At the same time, Universities are highly selective in admitting students; for general admission they usually require high school graduation, university preparatory curriculum, and a grade point average of 65 – 70 percent or higher. Students also must fulfill specific departmental requirements and compete with other applicants for acceptance (Brigham, 2008). As the Educational Policy Institute (2008) reports, "increases in admissions averages can limit the number of people from under-represented groups who are able to attend PSE."

This factor clearly has direct relevance for the many Aboriginal students in BC who have been streamed into non-academic programs in secondary school, and thus lack the necessary admission requirements or find that their skills, course completions, or grade point standing do not satisfy the rising entry requirements of post-secondary institutions. Disproportionately low numbers of

Aboriginal students are assigned a final mark in English 12 or English 12 First Peoples, and large numbers of Grade 12 Aboriginal students are assigned no mark at all for language arts. In addition, far too few Aboriginal students are assigned a mark for a Grade 10 math course. For Aboriginal students attending many rural BC School Districts, the participation rates in key Grade 12 courses are even lower, putting these students at an additional disadvantage when considering higher education (FNESC, 2005).

1.2 Personal Challenges

In addition to limited academic preparation, as highlighted in the feedback gathered through the October 2013 Forum workbooks, Aboriginal students face numerous personal challenges that make transitions to PSE difficult.

Although data in this area is limited, anecdotal information strongly suggests that a relatively large proportion of Aboriginal students must deal with significant emotional, financial, and family challenges, so schools and institutes must meet not only academic but also a variety of personal needs if the students are to be successful. According to a 2012 study by the Assembly of First Nations:

Social issues tend to reflect the conditions that exist in First Nations communities that can frustrate efforts to create self-sufficiency, such as alcohol and substance abuse, family dysfunction, low education success rates, and illiteracy. First Nations respondents frequently point to a history of economic deficiency and to the effects of residential schools as disrupting cultural transmission, thereby contributing to a population lacking self-esteem, confidence, and basic life skills.

Also, Aboriginal students are older than the majority of university students and, therefore, have accumulated more familial responsibilities than non-Aboriginal students. In a survey of Aboriginal students, Restoule et. al. (2013) found that over 70 percent of respondents said family and community responsibilities take precedence over schooling. Generally, Aboriginal students are further removed from the relatively carefree days of early adulthood and more likely to face pressures of juggling school with family obligations. As a result, while managing practical day-to-day matters on the home front can be difficult, coping with the demands of academia at the same time can be overwhelming (Oliver et. al., 2013).

Further, not only do many Aboriginal students not perceive themselves as potential post-secondary candidates; their families may also face issues that make it difficult for them to promote higher education as a viable option. For example, research shows that parents' educational attainment is a critical factor in PSE access; young Canadians whose parents went to university are twice as likely to attend University as those whose parents completed high school alone, and three to four times as

likely as those whose parents did not complete high school at all (Acumen Research Group, 2008). Additionally, COMPAS Inc. (2005) completed a study for the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation that explored drivers for PSE. According to that study, the likelihood that a parent has discussed PSE with their child rises with the parent's education. Parents who did not finish high school are the least apt (58%) to have discussed their child's educational future, compared to those who completed college or university (88% among each group) and those with more than one university degree (96%).

Low PSE attainment rates, therefore, can be a reinforcing trend. These issues have direct relevance for Aboriginal students, as a disproportionate number of them represent the first generation of their families to attend PSE.

1.3 Integrating into a New Setting

In addition, students who are considering PSE can be intimidated by the challenges that accompany such an overwhelming change. Also, those who have gained admission into a bridging or degree program can experience a range of difficulties in making a successful transition and settling into the unfamiliar environment.

For those shifting from rural and remote communities, especially, adjusting to a new and strange setting can be disorientating, and being physically separated from family and community support networks can be extremely challenging. Oliver et. al. (2013) conducted a study with PSE students, post-secondary staff, and community members in Australia. In that study, many Aboriginal students reported feeling overwhelmed, nervous and/or scared when they considered and first started higher education. This was particularly the case if they were young and the first member of their family to attend university.

In addition, Aboriginal students often feel disconnected from mainstream PSE settings. Too often, post-secondary programs ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values, and issues and give inadequate attention to the work environments in which students will use their professional knowledge and skills. In fact, post-secondary environments may replicate the negative features that led students to drop out of school in the first place (RCAP, 1996). At the same time, support systems — peer networks, family activities, financial, personal and academic counselling, or daycare services — may not be in place in mainstream settings. As the Assembly of First Nations (2012) reports:

Transitioning from secondary school to post-secondary is a major undertaking for any young person. For many First Nations learners, it usually requires moving away from family, friends, and community to attend post-secondary studies, as most post-secondary institutions are located outside First Nations communities. Ready or not,

students need to manage living on their own without the normal family and extended family supports most have become accustomed to from life on reserve.

For many Aboriginal people, mainstream universities represent impersonal and intimidating environments that do not reflect or recognize their cultural knowledge, traditions, and core values (FNESC, 2005). As described by Don Drummond, the Co-Chair of the Queen's Conference on Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education (cited in Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011):

Canada's large universities in particular have come to operate almost in factory-like mode. They wait for applications to come from Grade 12 graduates with really high marks. ... They take the chosen and stuff them into huge auditoriums to hear lectures. The rejected become someone else's issue. The accepted won't hear about the history of Canada's or the world's Indigenous populations ... They will receive very little support. And most won't need support because they came with a sound education and they have financial backing. Nothing in this model works to serve the interests of a large segment of Canada's Aboriginal population.

Further, research has shown that some Aboriginal students encounter explicit racism on university campuses, and even more students are concerned about indirect racism and the implicit cultural bias pervasive in academia. In the study by Oliver et. al. (2013), students reported being able to deal with overt racist behaviours, but they were unsure how to manage the 'cultural insensitivity' of individuals and PSE institutions, which may be more subtle but can have very damaging effects.

1.4 Financial Barriers

In addition to the issues cited above, financial barriers can be the primary variable for many Aboriginal students considering whether to attend PSE.

Generally, relatively high levels of unemployment and poverty for First Nations people mean that the majority of First Nations families do not have sufficient incomes to provide funds for themselves or their children to attend post-secondary institutions. In fact, there is consensus amongst researchers that individuals from the highest income families are much more likely to go on to university than are those from lower income families. 2006 Census data shows that children in families with parental income of \$100,000 or more were almost twice as likely to have education savings compared to children in families with a parental income of less than \$25,000 – 83 percent for the higher income group versus 42 percent for the lower income families.

Financial barriers also relate to the unique characteristics of Aboriginal students, who are more likely to be older, married, and have children than other post-secondary students. As well as paying for tuition, they are more likely to need housing suitable for a married couple or a family and have

child-care expenses. At the same time, Aboriginal post-secondary students are less likely to live at home rent-free.

Added to the socio-economic challenges faced by many First Nations students and families, the cost of attending post-secondary is rising. For more than a decade, average tuition fees in Canada have increased at a faster pace than inflation. Additional compulsory PSE fees also have increased significantly. Most researchers take the view that financial barriers relating to tuition fees are likely to have a greater impact on people from lower income families than on people from wealthier backgrounds, suggesting that targeted solutions are preferable to universal solutions – that is, directed grants are preferable to general tuition reductions.

It is therefore important to consider the sources of direct financial assistance that are available Aboriginal students.

In Canada, some funding is accessible to Status Indian students through the federal government's PSE Program, which includes the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) Program.

The PSSSP supports all types of post-secondary learning, including college certificate and diploma programs, as well as university undergraduate and professional programs. The program covers tuition support for full- and part-time studies, travel support for students and their dependants, and support for living expenses. University and College Entrance Preparation (UCEP) funding provides one-year of support for students enrolled in programs designed for those who need to attain the academic level required for entry into a degree or diploma program. Both programs are limited to status Indians and Inuit people.

The PSSSP and UCEP are operated under authority provided through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). Therefore, the federal government has the authority to increase or decrease funds available and change the eligibility criteria for students. Nationally, almost 100 percent of the PSSSP and UCEP funding is transferred by AANDC and is delivered directly by First Nations or their administering organizations. The financial support is subject to the selection criteria defined in First Nations' respective local operating guidelines, which must reflect a number of parameters set by AANDC, but can vary somewhat by community.

Yet while many Status Indian students currently have access to funding from AANDC's PSE Program, there are a considerable number of students who do not have access to these funds and there are numerous challenges even for those who do. The Assembly of First Nations (2012) notes that many Canadians believe that First Nations people receive full funding from the federal government to attend post-secondary, but on the contrary – "the situation gets bleaker every year for First Nations learners hoping to enroll in PSE." As clearly articulated by the October 2013

Forum participants, even among those students who do receive federal PSE funding, the amount provided is inadequate to cover all of the real costs of living in a city away from home.

In a survey to accompany a 2005 Departmental evaluation of the AANDC PSE program, all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is a continued need for PSE funding and over 77 percent of the graduated and enrolled students participating in the evaluation stated that they would not have attended post-secondary institutions if they had not received PSSSP support. Yet although data limitations prevented precise quantification of demand, AANDC's 2005 evaluation report noted that there is "no doubt that requests for funding exceed available resources" (INAC, 2005).

As outlined in a report by R.A. Malatest and Stonechild (2008), "given the high level of reliance on band funding, it would appear that current funding levels are insufficient given the demand and accelerating costs associated with PSE." Students surveyed as a part of that study indicated that overall demand for PSSSP and UCEP funding exceeds what is available for many First Nations communities, resulting in some students having to go on waiting lists or being passed over for funding. As a result of a limited pool of available funding, many First Nations give preference to specific types of students, commonly including full-time students, students continuing with their studies, youth who have just completed high school, or those who have previously not left their education to pursue other activities. Some types of studies are rarely or never funded through PSSSP and UCEP funding, including post-graduate and professional studies (Malatest and Stonechild, 2008).

The limited availability of post-secondary funding also was highlighted in the 2009 audit of the AAANDC post-secondary program. As that audit states, the Program initially provided funding for all eligible students. In 1989, the Program was revised to allow for the deferral of student applications in instances where student eligibility exceeded the available Program budget. Recipient funding at that time moved from "a demand driven (fully funded) model" to an "equitable distribution of available funds model." Since then, Treasury Board allocations to the Department have increased on a percentage basis, with annual increases of two percent or less since 1996. The audit goes on to comment:

It is apparent that at least two external factors currently jeopardize Program effectiveness. Firstly, the cost of sending a student to a post-secondary institution is increasing, most notably in the area of tuition costs. While the scope of the audit did not include a detailed analysis of tuition costs, information from Statistics Canada indicates that the average annual increase in these costs over the past decade was 4.3%. The audit also noted that student enrolment in the Program has declined over the past eight years from 27,000 students (1998/99) to 22,000 students (2006-2007).

Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that not all eligible students are able to obtain Program financial support due to a lack of Program funds. While the department does not gather information nationally of wait-listed (or deferred) students, regional office visits confirmed that some First Nation recipients have wait-listed students. The audit team also noted that the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) reported in November 2004 that (in 2000) the Assembly of First Nations estimated that a lack of funding was preventing approximately 9,500 First Nations people from pursuing post-secondary education.

In spite of the PSSSP and UCEP limitations, however, the programs remain the critical source of financial support for many students. While other sources of funding are available to students, they have significant limitations.

For example, the Canada Student Loans Program can provide eligible students financial support for PSE. In addition to a federal student loan, students also are sometimes eligible for a student loan from their respective province or territory.

However, Aboriginal youth generally appear to be wary of borrowing money to finance their post-secondary studies, as they often have an understandable aversion to take on debt to finance their education. In general, people living near the poverty line are usually reluctant to borrow money. Many students also are uncomfortable relying on loans, as they perceive access to post-secondary education as an Aboriginal right.

In addition, taking on debt in order to attend post-secondary can be riskier and more expensive for Aboriginal students; often they have considerably higher financial requirements than other students because they need to travel to attend college/university and they therefore incur additional living expenses. Statistically, Aboriginal people who hold degrees still have lower incomes than non-Aboriginal degree holders, making loan repayment more difficult.

As reported in a study by R.A. Malatest and Stonechild (2008), many Aboriginal students have young families and come from impoverished areas and may consider the risk that they will be unable to pay back their loans to be too high. A number of youth involved in that research noted “they had seen friends or family members struggling for years with unmanageable debt as a result of student loans and did not want the same fate for themselves.” In spite of those challenges, however, many Aboriginal students increasingly are having to rely on borrowing to attend post-secondary, and are subsequently finding it difficult to repay the loans.

Finally, while a range of scholarships and bursaries are available, the support provided through them is often minimal relative to tuition and living costs and, while necessary and important, scholarships are not adequate as a solution to the significant PSE funding challenges that exist.

Moreover, many of these awards are not administered by Aboriginal organizations and may or may not reflect community priorities, values, and needs.

Part Two – Suggesting Some Solutions: Supports for Effective Student Transitions

Reflecting the input from the October 2013 Forum participants and related literature, a number of suggested responses to existing barriers are described below.

In considering the suggestions and approaches now being taken, it is critical to note that Aboriginal people should not be viewed as a homogeneous population. Numerous variables affect individual students' transitions to post-secondary and their information and support needs. While this report identifies a number of broad issues associated with transitions, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the information across the broad population of Aboriginal students. Therefore, all issues and possible responses should be explored locally, with the Aboriginal students and communities involved.

Also, effective transition programs will require a comprehensive approach, as the October 2013 Forum participants referred to as “wrap around support.” Bangster (2008) notes that stand-alone interventions may be insufficient for students with multidimensional needs, and Aboriginal students accordingly will require a comprehensive combination of appropriate coursework, along with counselling, ongoing assessment, financial aid, and other types of assistance – especially to keep struggling students on track for high school graduation and post-secondary success. Malatest and Associates (2010) also report that many post-secondary institutions have taken a holistic approach and have implemented a number of programs, each targeting different underlying causes of the lower incidence of PSE success among Aboriginal students.

Overall, the education challenges facing Aboriginal students represent a complex web of historical, economic, health, and social realities, and these issues do not lend themselves to a one-dimensional solution. Therefore, some combination of the suggestions outlined below should be considered.

2.1 Better Academic Preparation and Higher Expectations at the K-12 Level

Reflecting the widespread assertions that barriers to PSE begin long before students are at an appropriate age to apply for post-secondary, varied strategies have been implemented to better prepare high school students for PSE and employment.

Based upon a review of many of those strategies, Bangster (2008) identified “crosscutting lessons that decision makers should consider in tailoring programs and policies to local circumstances.” The first among the lessons he reports is that interventions that begin in the junior or senior year can be too late – certainly for those students who have already dropped out but also for those who have aspirations for PSE but have not passed the required courses. By beginning earlier, it is

possible to engage students when they should be developing initial PSE and career aspirations, accompanied by an appropriate academic plan.

Bangster (2008) specifically notes that students need to pass core ninth-grade courses in English, math, science and social studies if they are to remain on track for high school graduation. If students do not pass key “gatekeeper courses” on time, it can be difficult to complete the full sequence of coursework needed for PSE. Students must understand the importance of taking and passing the early courses, and schools must provide sufficient access to these courses along with the necessary supports to help students pass them.

In addition, high school curricula need to be rigorous, relevant, and engaging to prepare students for successful post-secondary activities. Evidence shows that students – including those with previously low achievement levels – who take more rigorous, academically intense programs in high school enroll and persist in PSE at higher rates than similar students who pursue less challenging courses of study (Bangster, 2008). For example, a study of Indigenous students in Australia (Purdy et. al, 2000) found that efforts to enhance self-identity through generalized self-concept programs have not had lasting effects on the school performance of students; more effective have been efforts that incorporate a strong emphasis on increasing students’ academic skill levels. When students are helped to master core academic skills, they develop a more positive concept of themselves as students. Hence, they are more likely to persist rather than give up easily on academic tasks, and they are more likely to approach rather than avoid new challenges.

In addition, specific supports needed for Aboriginal K-12 students were reported based upon a survey of Aboriginal Education Counsellors in Ontario (Toulouse, 2010). The recommendations resulting from that study include culturally appropriate curricula that honour the contributions, traditions and values of Aboriginal peoples, which is taught by caring and culturally sensitive educators. As Williams (1993) notes, too many educators expect children to leave their cultures (knowledge, abilities, interests, values, etc.) at the schoolhouse door and to function as empty vessels into which teachers pour school knowledge. Students are of course *not* blank slates when they come to school. The education system must acknowledge that culture exerts a powerful influence over what knowledge is valued and what is learned. In fact, the cultural context provides a frame of reference – a lens that enables the learner to value and make meaning of new knowledge – and tapping students’ understandings and experiences will actually accelerate learning.

Toulouse (2010) also suggests that special efforts must be made to engage parents and communities as equal partners in K-12 education, and to ensure that Aboriginal community resource people are involved in the school system to promote greater Aboriginal student success in high schools.

Overall, it is important to set higher expectations for Aboriginal students, as too often Aboriginal students are taught from a deficit rather than constructivist point of view (Swisher, 1997). Bamburg (1994) suggests that the curricular and pedagogical models used with many

disadvantaged children view the students as possessing deficiencies that must be corrected – a view that reflects an assumption that they come from impoverished home environments that have provided few of the skills and little of the knowledge that students need in order to experience academic success. Too often, teaching approaches are “based on a set of expectations that poor and minority students possess a limited capacity to learn until the deficit has been eliminated” (Bamburg, 1994). For example, in a study by Restoule et. al., (2013), approximately one third of participating Aboriginal post-secondary students in Ontario reported that their high school staff did not expect them to do well in high schools and that they did not feel supported in those settings. In addition, Aboriginal students frequently find themselves removed from the mainstream and segregated into remedial programs in disproportionately large numbers. But these remedial classes often lack the hallmarks of a traditional high-achieving classroom, such as high expectations for student performance and a challenging, engaging curriculum that will lead to PSE (Latham, 1997).

Instead, it is each school and teacher's responsibility to honour students' prior knowledge and experiences – to find out what each student knows and build on his or her strengths. Positive approaches do not ignore students' needs and challenges, but rather focus on potential. Teachers must maintain high expectations and communicate the belief that all students can be successful, rather than making excuses or blaming homes or communities if students are struggling. Research has shown that a teacher's expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies: students who sense that more is expected of them tend to outperform students who believe that less is expected of them – regardless of the students' actual abilities. This finding means that teachers must ensure that there are overt and consistent messages that students will succeed, based upon respect for students and a genuine belief in student capability (www.knowledgeloom.org).

According to Benard (2003), when students are asked what quality teaching means to them, they are very often unequivocal in their answer: a caring teacher who accepts “no excuses” and who refuses to let them fail. In addition, long-term studies of how young people successfully overcome risks and challenges — such as troubled families, poverty, and other socio-economic disadvantages — to become competent, confident, and caring individuals, as well as successful students, clearly document the power of caring teachers and schools that convey high expectations and provide opportunities for their active participation in the learning process.

The message at K-12, then, must be clear – each Aboriginal student is expected to reach his or her full potential and is fully capable of pursuing meaningful opportunities beyond high school. The education system must recognize that streaming of Aboriginal students is a serious problem that must be addressed. And K-12 school communities must work to ensure that Aboriginal students are provided the skills and credentials needed for access to PSE.

2.2 High School Counselling, Information Sharing, and Exposure to PSE

In addition to general comments about academic rigour and post-secondary oriented high school environments, secondary schools can provide a range of specific supports to complement students' academic preparation for post-secondary and the workforce (Bangster, 2008). The specific supports to be considered include early and ongoing counselling and increased awareness opportunities for students and their families.

2.2.1 Promoting a Greater Understanding of Academic Requirements and Career Planning and Exposure Opportunities

As noted by the October 2013 Forum participants and a range of supporting evidence, a relatively large percentage of Aboriginal learners do not graduate from K-12 fully prepared for post-secondary. They therefore must enter university using various pathways, including university bridging courses, special course entry arrangements, or after obtaining post-schooling qualifications from registered training organizations.

Research also suggests, however, that if provided with adequate and appropriate counselling and support, many Aboriginal students would choose the traditional pathway of high school graduation leading directly to PSE (Oliver et. al., 2013).

In fact, a key challenge for Aboriginal students generally is the need for better awareness of academic requirements for PSE entrance, and early and continued career planning.

Malatest and Stonechild (2010) suggest that Aboriginal students need to be given information about post-secondary and career planning at a young age. Providing information early in a student's education will not only help students who do finish Grade 12 to plan for their futures; it will also help those students who leave school before graduating know how to get information at some point in the future. Further, some Aboriginal post-secondary students included in the Malatest and Stonechild study commented that career planning information should be provided to youth again and again throughout high school, as students may have different questions at different stages of their high school experience. Career fairs, workshops and information presentations were suggested as possible avenues for providing information, but when these opportunities are offered, it is most beneficial when they are a part of the school curriculum, rather than add-on activities.

Further, in providing information and reaching out to Aboriginal K-12 students, it is critical that career planning and PSE promotional and recruitment materials are relevant to Aboriginal students. Aboriginal youth surveyed in a study by Restoule et. al. (2013) suggested that career planning and recruitment information provided to Aboriginal students often is vague and does not represent their needs; "they could not see themselves in the representations." The youth recommended that efforts should:

- provide more information about “everyday issues” that affect Aboriginal students – funding, housing, food banks, childcare, and part-time jobs or job training activities;
- create posters of successful Aboriginal PSE graduates and present packages with details and pictures of Aboriginal people;
- provide detailed information about the cultural and Elder supports, cultural events, housing, academic assistance, etc. that are available for Aboriginal students;
- facilitate Aboriginal youth speakers who can talk about “more than just how important it is to go into PSE;
- have PSE information made specifically for Aboriginal youth that includes a “what to expect” section that takes applicants step-by-step through the first year process;
- provide information earlier in secondary school; and
- provide time, starting in Grade 9, devoted to discussing PSE.

A further criterion for success includes more support for Aboriginal students to make appropriate enrolment choices, as too often Aboriginal students are directed to study areas which do not suit their interests or skills, which does not support their long-term success. Oliver et. al. (2011) recommend that strategies are needed to ensure that Aboriginal students select courses and programs that are appropriate for their aims and interests. It should not be assumed that students will only wish to study Aboriginal culture in a humanities degree. Students need to be informed about the broad spectrum of course options available to them, and it is important to encourage enrolments in faculties with low numbers of Aboriginal students in order to broaden these students’ career opportunities. Staff engaged in counselling need to make sure that students receive good course and career advice about bridging courses, pathways, undergraduate degrees, ‘taster’ opportunities, and combinations of these, in order to develop realistic expectations of study. Taster opportunities would include short course opportunities, such as two-week on-campus learning modules that count for credit.

Exposure to the world of work also can be important because high school students often lack information about the educational requirements for particular jobs. Relevant activities in this regard could include paid and unpaid internships, guest lecturers, career days, youth apprenticeships, career education workshops, job shadowing, cooperative education opportunities, and visits and tours of various post-secondary institutes with planned activities that highlight the academic, service, and social/recreational aspects of the settings. Based upon his research review, Bangster (2008) indicates that students generally find one-on-one contacts with employers onsite to be more helpful than group worksite tours or school-based activities, and that work experience should be structured to complement, not substitute for, students’ academics.

In fact, illustrations of innovative approaches to skills development were highlighted at the October 2013 Forum. For example, Chalo School, which belongs to the Fort Nelson First Nation, is a partner in the Northern Opportunities program, which aims to provide young people with a seamless learning pathway from secondary school to post-secondary trades/technology training and careers.

The Northern Opportunities program is based on the principles that careers can begin while still in high school, and that students in Northeastern BC should be provided opportunities to be 'Trained in the North' so that they can "Stay in the North.' With a view 'beyond bricks and mortar' this collaboration of industry, education and government builds upon the notion that career pathways may begin in a number of different ways, including work experience and apprenticeships as well as through university transfer courses. Dual Credit Programs available at local Northern Lights College campuses are making it possible for secondary students to begin post-secondary pursuits while still in high school (www.northernopportunities.bc.ca).

A second partnership highlighted at the Forum involves School District #52 (Prince Rupert) and the Paul Martin Foundation, resulting in the Aboriginal Entrepreneurship course. The goal of this initiative is to encourage youth to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to achieve success in secondary school, the workplace, post-secondary education or training and daily life, by giving students entrepreneurial opportunities and access to business ownership. Students increase proficiency in math, English, accounting, marketing and IT, while increasing communication and leadership skills.

Aboriginal Entrepreneurship 11 and Entrepreneurship 12 are each full semester courses designed to run consecutively. During the program, students create a venture plan for their own small businesses and through hands-on experiences, students have opportunities to develop the values, traits, and skills often associated with successful entrepreneurs. Each student is mentored throughout the planning and implementation process. Using the services of local banks, students open and maintain accounts to operate their businesses. Students are provided funding to cover start-up costs and must comply with all required record keeping and other accountability measures. Students also participate in a venture plan competition, and start and run their own business (www.sd52.bc.ca).

In supporting appropriate entry into these and other important opportunities, Bangster (2008) notes that counselling should be supported by assessment data to identify relevant candidates and as part of a concerted "early warning system," beginning in the ninth grade, that identifies struggling students and ensures that they get relevant supports. These early and regular assessments should be tied to measures of college and workplace readiness, such as gaining feedback on whether students are on track to succeed in post-secondary courses. In order to make this possible, more progress is needed in aligning high school assessments with the demands of PSE and the workplace.

2.2.2 *Raising Awareness of Financial Realities*

In addition to education and career planning, the specific issue of financial awareness was reviewed extensively in a study for the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation by the Acumen Research Group (2008). That study analyzed data regarding perceptions of PSE by Aboriginal students and parents, specifically considering the question "Does knowledge matter?" Based on the results of its

research program, the Acumen Research Group indicated that the answer to that question “is a resounding ‘yes.’”

The Acumen Research Group specifically notes that the economic benefits, as well as the wider non-economic benefits, of a higher education are now widely recognized by policy makers. Lifetime earnings advantages of a university degree compared to a high school diploma appear to average approximately \$1,000,000 in Canada. Yet most people overestimate the short-term costs of university in relation to the long-term benefits of PSE by a factor of five. Those from lower-income families have the most serious misperceptions, to the point that they typically think the costs of PSE outweigh the benefits. Not only do low-income Canadians think that tuition is higher than it actually is, but they grossly underestimate how much more university graduates make in comparison to high school graduates (Acumen, 2008).

Research completed by COMPAS Inc. (2005) adds to this finding, showing that more educated parents are generally more knowledgeable about the financial aspects of PSE. These findings suggest that interventions and better awareness could correct misperceptions and increase post-secondary enrolments, especially among under-represented populations. Specifically, COMPAS Inc. asserts that it may be helpful to target less informed audiences with information about resources available to students, as letting them know about available sources of financing may be a good way to alleviate concerns about the expensive nature of PSE.

Important elements to be addressed through counselling efforts, therefore, include the provision of information on college costs and financing options. As the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2011) notes, many Canadian students lack information about basic issues, such as interest, assistance eligibility, and assessment criteria. This led the Committee to include Recommendation 3:

The committee recommends that the federal government work together with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, to improve the information about post-secondary education provided to Canadians, including primary and secondary school students and their parents, and that the information provided include the following:

- a) the costs and benefits of obtaining a post-secondary diploma or degree;
- b) information about financial assistance, including eligibility criteria as well as the terms of loan repayment and forgiveness; and
- c) an overview of the complete range of educational programs available, including trade schools, apprenticeships, and college and university programs.

Malatest and Stonechild (2008) also studied the need for more information for Aboriginal students about financial options. Many Aboriginal people interviewed and surveyed in that research noted a

reduced awareness of financing options among Aboriginal youth, and in comparison with non-Aboriginal youth, Aboriginal youth were seen to have considerably less information and motivation to explore the full range of funding options to support them in attending a PSE program.

The Malatest and Stonechild (2008) focus group discussions demonstrated that the costs of attending PSE are not well understood by high school students, perhaps reflecting the fact that many Aboriginal youth believe that band funding alone will be sufficient to cover the costs of post-secondary. Although this is often not the case—particularly for youth who are leaving their communities to take college or university programs in cities with comparatively high costs of living or who have children to care for – the misperception means that many youth do not seek out the information they might really need. Additionally, it appears that Aboriginal students feel a lack of confidence in their ability to qualify for scholarships or loans, disconnected from institutional/bureaucratic systems and – importantly – are concerned about incurring debt to pay for PSE.

In addition to challenges related to motivation, the information that Aboriginal students require to make informed decisions is either not available or not available in a way that is readily accessible to them, as reflected in the Ministry of Advanced Education’s Aboriginal Policy Framework Goal 2, Action 3: “to promote and raise awareness of financial support programs for Aboriginal post-secondary learners.”

According to the Malatest and Stonechild research, Aboriginal high school students are commonly utilizing informal channels to obtain information on PSE funding options, such as through friends or family members. While some youth are getting information from other sources, including teachers and counsellors in their communities, there appears to be a relatively limited reliance on “formal” methods of obtaining information. This situation is often a direct result of insufficient access for Aboriginal youth, especially those living in remote communities, to available information about student funding and assistance.

Aboriginal youth often prefer getting information through face-to-face contact with people in their own communities, but this type of support is sometimes limited. Additionally, the Internet is generally not as accessible for Aboriginal youth as it is for other youth. Many Aboriginal youth are from communities and families that do not have widespread experience with the PSE system, and there is often, as a result, a lower degree of familiarity with the bureaucratic systems of PSE funding. Furthermore, many Aboriginal young people return to their education after a period of working, looking after their family members, or other activities, and they may be somewhat disconnected from the informational supports available to those currently in the high school system who are moving directly to PSE. There is also a lack of awareness about funding options to pursue upgrading and trades training. More information in this regard would therefore be very valuable.

Overall, the Malatest and Stonechild (2008) research confirms the need to enhance awareness among First Nations youth of the full range of financing programs. Related suggestions provided by key informants in their study include the following.

- More human resources and better training is needed for staff dedicated to educating Aboriginal youth about post-secondary funding in communities and in colleges and universities.
- Courses on career and education planning need to be a consistent part of the secondary school curriculum.
- More funding and support are needed to increase Internet access in First Nations communities.
- Promotional materials specifically designed to target Aboriginal youth are important, including brochures, posters and pamphlets that are “more inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives.”
- Some Aboriginal youth who had not attended PSE noted that because a large number of Aboriginal youth in their area were under the care of the ministry, more information on available forms of social assistance should be targeted to those who are wards of the province.

Similarly, Aboriginal youth often find the application process for student loans to be a challenge, with many identifying their inability to track the status of their application or to receive one-on-one assistance with the application as sources of frustration. Some youth also note issues that could hinder access to scholarships and other forms of assistance, including an inability to complete volunteer work and difficulties with written components of applications. Counselling for these issues would be very valuable.

2.2.3 Personal Counselling

In addition to the importance of financial awareness, there seems to be increasing evidence that those from disadvantaged backgrounds may not be attending PSE institutions because of non-monetary reasons as well as financial concerns.

Therefore, simply counseling students about the benefits of post-secondary and providing more information about funding options will not be sufficient. Other issues are more important for some young people, such as low self-confidence. Also, the tensions and conflicts associated with identity change and dislocation from familiar comfort zones are serious concerns for many students (Acumen Research Group, 2008). Oliver et. al (2013), for example, recommend that students need to become familiar with the expectations of higher education. There is a need for Aboriginal students to be taught the skills and knowledge to be proactive about their studies; that is, how to overcome the obstacles they will encounter along the way, and how successful students achieve their academic goals. Aboriginal students should also be provided with an understanding of how to handle the following issues that may arise as a result of cultural disconnections.

- Unfair demands placed on them by academic staff or students who ask them to respond on behalf of other Aboriginal people.

- Feeling that their Aboriginal identity is under threat as they learn more about western academic ways of viewing the world.
- Occasions when western academic models or perspectives ignore or misrepresent Aboriginal culture, history or ways of being, or when Aboriginal knowledge is not embedded in a unit of course that requires it.
- Feeling discouragement caused by loss of motivation.
- Having difficulty making a connection with course content.
- Balancing the demands of study and cultural obligations.

Accordingly, some counselling interventions will ideally be of a more personal nature, making Aboriginal students feel that they can fit in to higher education institutions and helping them undergo an identity formation that includes images of themselves as people who deserve a higher education and can succeed. In other words, these students must be encouraged to think more highly of themselves in terms of academic performance and to look beyond an immediate horizon that does not involve higher learning (Bangster, 2008). Further, a post-secondary-going culture should be instilled early, for ninth-grade students, and counsellors who work with students with disabilities should receive particular training (Oliver et. al., 2013). Malatest and Stonechild (2010) report that face-to-face contact with Aboriginal youth was seen to be preferable, as they benefit most from personal contact with a counsellor or coordinator. Some typical avenues for delivering information don't work; instead, skilled, engaged counsellors are needed to motivate youth and to build their aspirations and their capacity to access the necessary information.

Additional suggested steps to help keep students engaged and learning include the following.

- A positive relationship with a caring adult mentor, which can be provided individually or in groups.
- Small, supportive advisory groups, led by school staff who develop a personal relationship with students.
- Early forums for students and their families to increase their knowledge of the resources and opportunities available for a successful transition to PSE and employment.

The Acumen Research Group concludes that:

Information programs need to be established to correct misperceptions, and these need to be directed at all high school students, especially in the earlier years of high school. These programs need to be especially sensitive in identifying first-generation PSE students with academic potential that may not be evident in their academic record.

Additionally, many informants have noted that counselling and information delivery should make use of role models. Some Aboriginal post-secondary students suggested that First Nations university students or graduates should be reaching out to other youth in the early high school

years in order to inspire them to continue on with their education and begin to plan for PSE. Restoule et. al. (2013), for example, report that one of the best predictors of successful transitions was knowing other Aboriginal people who have gone on to PSE or completed degrees.

Reflecting this perspective, the National Aboriginal Role Model Program was created to celebrate the accomplishments of Aboriginal youth ages 13 to 30. Lead Your Way inspires Aboriginal youth to strive to reach their goals. Each year, 12 Aboriginal role models are selected for their achievements, leadership and innovation, who are nominated by their peers. Throughout the year, the role models can attend celebrations, school functions, workshops, and conferences. The role models share their stories and messages with other Aboriginal youth and try to inspire more young people to set goals and work towards achieving them. They also encourage youth to make positive and healthy choices that will help improve their lives and their communities (<http://www.naho.ca/rolemodel/>).

Finally, related literature also echoes the feedback shared by the October 2013 Forum participants regarding the potential benefits of encouraging Aboriginal students to take part in extra-curricular activities, and the need for financial support to make this possible (Toulouse, 2010). Extra-curricular involvement has been cited as a particularly useful way to build self-confidence amongst students, and communities, schools and post-secondary institutions can work together to use this tool to promote student transitions through and beyond high school.

2.3 Community Efforts to Build Student Resilience and Family Capacity

As highlighted by the October 2013 Forum participants, as well as improved counselling services in schools, important efforts can be undertaken by Aboriginal communities to support students and families, and the development of ‘resilience’ has been highlighted as “an essential quality that enables Aboriginal students to persevere” (Oliver et. al., 2013). In the Oliver et. al. (2013) study, participants highlighted a number of personal qualities that are believed to facilitate transitions given what is known about the PSE system, including an internal motivation to learn, personal aspirations, professional ambition, and/or a desire to give back to their community.

Relevant literature also emphasizes the value of helping students develop a strong ‘sense of self’ as an Aboriginal person, which can underpin their drive to follow through with their educational goals. In the study by Oliver et. al. (2010), while some students took pride in being the first family member “to achieve academic success at a university level,” others were motivated by concern with the wider world and a desire to “change everyone’s ideas on what our people can do.” Malatest and Stonechild (2008) echoed the importance of self-confidence and strong self-identity, as many youth involved in their study noted that other individuals had an influence on their plans and decisions, but in the end self-motivation was the primary driver behind their decisions and plans related to attending PSE.

Parents, families, and community members can help students become “resourceful individuals who are determined to succeed and proactive when encountering obstacles.” Many students with disabilities are particularly unaware of their full potential, and it is important to expose these students to resources and supports that will help them develop the self-advocacy skills they will need during the transition process and after high school (Bangster 2008).

Also, as mentioned above, a sense of responsibility to family and community motivates many Aboriginal students to engage in higher education, and efforts should therefore be made to build upon and take advantage of this positive characteristic. Malatest and Stonechild’s (2008) survey of students, for example, indicated that goals related to family and community — rather than solely individualistic goals — are major influences on Aboriginal youths’ decisions around PSE. Some students involved in that study indicated the desire for economic security to better enable them to provide for their families and advance the quality of both their own lives and those of their family. Many other students expressed the desire to help their communities with newly acquired skills. Youth often see themselves as potential role models for their own children, siblings or other members of their family or community.

Oliver et. al. (2013) further suggest that Aboriginal families for the most part can be an important source of inspiration and support. In their study, students whose parents were in professional occupations were able to draw on a family member’s experience in tertiary education for help; other students were motivated by the pride and hope that family members had in them.

In addition, youth in the Malatest and Stonechild (2008) study were asked to share their perspectives on which individuals in their lives had the biggest influence on their decisions and plans after high school, including plans related to PSE. Across all focus groups, Aboriginal youth most frequently cited family members as having had the biggest influence on their future plans. Many youth in the Malatest and Stonechild research discussed the positive influence of family on their decision-making as it relates to education, saying that family members had verbally encouraged them to finish high school and attend college or university. This encouragement came from both family members who had attended PSE and those who had not.

However, it is important to note that family members are seen as influencing youth in both positive and negative ways. A number of youth noted that their family actually had a negative influence on their decision-making, and a few youth noted that they came from families with difficulties, meaning that family-related issues had delayed their studies and led them “off track” for years.

Given the importance of family influence – both constructive and challenging – efforts can be taken to reinforce families’ capacities to provide support, and activities to promote more positive attitudes toward PSE should involve not only students but also their families and communities. Also, given the significant influence of family and community perceptions, opportunities should be

arranged to allow families and community members to show their encouragement for PSE, such as special events organized to celebrate student success and transitions.

2.4 Stronger Connections Between High Schools and Post-Secondary Institutions

As described by Kachuk Rosenbluth (2011) and reiterated above, it is well understood that the post-secondary system alone cannot solve issues related to transitions. All aspects of the education system – early learning, elementary and secondary, and post-secondary – have an equal and interconnected part to play in addressing educational barriers, and “the issues and responses are fluid and overlapping,” rendering conventional, fragmented approaches unlikely to succeed.

Further, like the October 2013 Forum workshop participants, relevant literature suggests the importance of joint planning and strong relationships between high schools and higher learning institutions, which can result in improved alignment of priorities, curricula and assessments, better integrated support activities, as well as various forms of dual-credit programs.

A survey of Aboriginal students in Ontario showed that a series of interactions that occurred between post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal youth in high schools had an impact on access to PSE long before the application process (Restoule et. al., 2013). High schools and post-secondary institutes can facilitate effective avenues of communication with prospective students and confirm ongoing contact with and support for existing students, which can be critical elements for successful transitions. Prospective students need to be sufficiently informed about entry requirements and about available supports early, so they can plan and prepare appropriately. Yet some Aboriginal students continue to report having difficulty accessing information about entry into university and about the services that are available (Toulouse, 2010), emphasizing the need for cooperative efforts to raise awareness about possible opportunities.

Further, the information that students do access must be relevant and meaningful to them. As reported by Restoule et. al. (2013), many Aboriginal students surveyed in their study did not feel that they belonged in post-secondary institutions, as the promotional materials “do not readily speak to them.” If recruitment materials present universities as being absent of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students will believe the institution is not for them, contributing to the ongoing problem of underrepresentation. As one youth participant in the Restoule et. al. study indicated, “he knew he would be rejected if he applied so he was going to reject the institution first by not applying” (Restoule et. al., 2013). Perceptions such as these must be pro-actively alleviated through positive representations of Aboriginal students being welcome and a visible part of post-secondary campuses. One way to address this issue is for post-secondary institutions to work more closely with the high schools they usually serve, in order to appropriately design and deliver PSE messages.

The Oliver et. al. (2013) study also includes Recommendation 3:

Universities should develop broader recruitment methods to ensure that they exploit both traditional and more creative approaches for providing accurate current information to prospective Aboriginal students. This can be done by:

- Advertising widely, not only through traditional strategies (e.g., mainstream newspapers, job networks, word of mouth, high school visits), but also through media which specifically targets Aboriginal audiences;
- Showing a presence at community events to reach family members (especially those of first-generation post-secondary students) who need to understand the commitment and contact hours required to achieve in higher education;
- Responding to and following up on individual student enquiries about entry, courses, and support with appropriate and explicit information and in a timely manner;
- Arranging targeted visits to schools to expose secondary school students to the opportunities available for university study;
- Inviting students to targeted sessions regarding the courses offered at university and the requirements these entail;
- Exploring innovative approaches for disseminating information.

The respondents in the Restoule et. al. study indicated that they had no input into the kinds of information institutions provide and, with the exception of a few outstanding Aboriginal support staff in high schools, they had very little support interacting with and navigating through the texts. These issues can be addressed. The students also emphasized the need for longer-term relationships, stating:

They [universities] only speak to us in our last year when they want us to apply and they say you need to go and this is not helpful.

If they really wanted us, they would come to our powwows, our community events, not just court us one day and leave.

Many initiatives have been put in place in response to these issues. For example, in Eastern Canada the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Information Program (APSIP) was created to enhance the awareness of educational opportunities for Aboriginal learners while empowering them to pursue PSE. The APSIP collective travels throughout Ontario and Quebec, including to remote schools and communities, encouraging all Aboriginal students to pursue PSE (www.apsip.com). Similarly, Colleges and Universities located in Winnipeg travel together as an outreach team to Aboriginal communities, allowing communities to thoroughly prepare for the collective visits and to build strong relationships between the institutions and communities (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011).

In BC, “Strengthening Connections” was formed in 2006, which involves a core group of Aboriginal recruiters and advisors from several BC post-secondary institutions with the mandate to provide Aboriginal peoples in BC with the information they need to successfully pursue a post-secondary education. Since its establishment, Strengthening Connections has grown to include all major universities in BC and a number of colleges. Although Strengthening Connections members are from individual institutions throughout BC, they work as a team across institutional lines to assist the students they serve in finding the best options for them.

Other post-secondary institutes across the country are also reaching out to high school and junior high students to create awareness of post-secondary options, and to “provide a positive, and enjoyable, first point of contact with the college or university.” Such initiatives aim to “nourish in young students the motivation to learn and succeed, to appreciate the value of a post-secondary education, and to see that they belong” (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011). Algoma University, for example, has a dedicated Native Recruitment Officer who travels to career fairs and community events to meet students and encourage them to attend the institution, and recruiters from Lakehead University liaise with human resource staff on-reserve and regularly attend career fairs as well as community events (Malatest, 2010). Several institutions in BC have also employed Aboriginal student recruiters.

As highlighted through the Oliver et. al. (2013) study, orientation programs for high school students are seen to be very useful, with a number of students outlining the academic and social benefits of such programs for enabling them to more easily transition into student university life. This is particularly important for students who may be the first member of their family to attend university. Accordingly, many institutes offer summer camps and summer tutoring programs for high school students. Kachuk Rosenbluth (2011) also notes that a number of colleges in Canada have organized canoe trips for Aboriginal high school students, to recruit and also to create a support network for those who decide to attend. The effects have been very positive.

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS) and the Mathematics Department at UBC also offer two free summer camp opportunities for Aboriginal students. The Transitional Summer Camp is for students transitioning from grade 7 to grade 8, the transition from elementary to high school. The main purpose of this camp is to help students prepare for high school. Students take 75 minutes of instruction in math and English in the mornings and participate in sports activities in the afternoon. The camp is free and the students receive a \$25 scholarship for good attendance and for demonstrating a strong work ethic every week. Additionally, the Emerging Aboriginal Scholars UBC High School Summer Camp is a five week summer camp for students currently attending grades 9 to 12. The main purpose of this camp is to help students with their academics and provide access work experience at the university. Students take 90 minutes of math and English every day, and three days each week they work with a faculty member in the area of their choice. Students are paid \$100 a week for 7.5 hours of work experience. The summer camp takes place at UBC, and students take classes at PIMS and the Long

House. In the past, participating students were able to work with the nuclear accelerator and at labs in the physics and chemistry departments, among other opportunities (www.pims.math.ca).

Sault College in Ontario offers open houses with specific First Nations groups and information sessions where potential students can learn about their program. In addition to traditional promotions, such as newspaper ads, the College also engages in direct community outreach by setting up booths and facilitating local events. The College is in the process of implementing a role model program, which will involve a panel of current Aboriginal students conversing through videoconference with high school students in northern, remote communities. The students will provide a realistic view of what college life is like. Another program, "Get Connected," invites new students to visit the college during the summer, and counsellors help the students find apartments, childcare and other amenities to help them feel more prepared and settled when classes begin.

The *University of Victoria (UVic) Campus Connections Program* aims to create connections between Indigenous students at the UVic and prospective students in local high schools. The program offers Indigenous high school students an opportunity to explore their educational goals and to make connections with UVic students who will share their personal education journeys. The program provides a series of opportunities that can be customized to meet the needs of each school. These include (but are not limited to):

- A UVic recruitment information presentation and classroom visit from UVic students with a focus on sharing their personal education experiences.
- A visit to the University campus hosted by UVic students, which can include lunch, a campus tour, and a career exploration activity.

Another example of an apparently successful mentoring program is the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Program. AIME involves a team of 100 staff partnered with 14 Australian universities and the like of Google, Atlassian, Virgin Australia, and Coca Cola, to facilitate mentoring by Aboriginal university students of Aboriginal high school students. Across the country, AIME delivers a range of different programs. The Core Program targets local Indigenous high school students who attend schools that are able to visit an AIME partner university campus on a weekly basis. The Outreach Program extends the AIME experience to Indigenous high school students from further afield through a more intensive full day format. In 2012, the year 9 to 12 completion rate for students participating in AIME was 71.2 percent – exceeding the national Aboriginal average of 38 percent and approaching the national non-Aboriginal average of 79.2 percent. The year 9 to university progression rate for AIME students was 22.1 percent – nearly six times the national Aboriginal average of 3.8 percent and approaching the national non-Aboriginal average of 36.8 percent. More details regarding this initiative are included in Appendix One.

Kachuk Rosenbluth (2011) additionally highlights an important concern in regard to outreach and orientation programs – the need to provide financial support for students who could not otherwise

afford them, and for students who do take advantage of support activities and then cannot afford to proceed further in their educations.

For example, the University of Winnipeg organizes a number of initiatives, developed with input from the community, offering support to Aboriginal students long before they get to high school. A Learning Centre seeks to motivate Aboriginal and other inner city Winnipeg students to stay in school, and it offers after-school, weekend, and summer camp activities. ECO Kids on Campus is a 12-week program during the school year for mid-level elementary school children, and ECO Youth on Campus is a summer camp for older students. Importantly, responding to concerns that these programs create unrealistic expectations for students who cannot afford to attend post-secondary, the University established an Opportunity Fund – contributing up to \$4,000 toward university education for every program participant, with annual payments for staying in school and raising their grades. As of 2011, the retention rate for the 653 student Opportunity Fund participants was the same as for students from wealthy families.

Further, the University of Winnipeg has established an innovative Collegiate Model School located on the campus of the University of Winnipeg Collegiate. Forty students from grade 9-12 attend the program – students who have been identified as being bright and capable of university entrance, but who are seen to be at-risk due to a number of barriers that could prevent them from reaching their potential. Students who complete the Collegiate Model School are provided tuition waivers for post-secondary. Twenty-two of the school’s students have graduated from PSE since 2008 (see Appendix Two for more information on these initiatives).

Finally, high schools and post-secondary institutes can work together to ensure relevant documentation of, and accountability for, transitions from high school. Connecting the records of the K-12 and post-secondary systems creates a high-quality data system spanning the K-16 continuum. The literature recommending connected data systems is entirely consistent with the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education*: Goal 5: Continuous improvement is based on research, data-tracking and sharing of leading practices.

2.5 Connections With Communities

In addition to connections between post-secondary institutions and high schools, there is also a need for stronger partnerships between higher learning settings and communities. A recurring theme of the Queen’s Conference was the importance of collaboration between institutions and communities in recognition of their complementary but different strengths (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011). Working with communities was referred to as a “pragmatic as well as a moral imperative,” building upon the rights and responsibilities of families and communities for the education of their people. An important beginning for such partnerships is the creation of an Aboriginal community

advisory or Governing Council that involve representatives of the communities being serviced and senior level university personnel, with access to necessary resources and staff. Through the Aboriginal Service Plan Initiative, a number of BC post-secondary institutions have set up Aboriginal Advisory Committees to guide their activities in Aboriginal education.

Presenters and participants at the Queen's Conference focused on the need for institutions to develop and sustain formal and informal partnerships for outreach, access, and retention, resulting in local approaches that take into account the priorities and circumstances of the communities and the strengths of the institution. However, the presenters also noted that institutions need to be pro-active and patient in reaching out to communities, recognizing that communities often have multiple and urgent demands and may not have the capacity to respond immediately. Further, "people must open their minds and hearts to hear each other and leave their baggage at the door in order to come to the discussion for real and open dialogue with respect and humility." Jothen (2011) also reports that participants in his research reiterated the need for true collaboration and respectful partnerships, which may require adequate time, energy and resources for trust and relationship building.

Institutions also must understand that what works for one community does not necessarily work for another, and that communities themselves must decide what they need and want. Jothen (2011), for example, notes that the BC Ministry of Advanced Education's 2007 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Strategy showed that partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organizations were described quite differently depending on the institution, and illustrated the varying degree of how one might build and interpret a genuine, respectful partnership. The Strategy also showed possibilities for sustained, systemic collaboration, as Vancouver Island University and its community partners developed a five-year plan to improve Aboriginal student transitions, supports, and outcomes.

A "promising practice" highlighted in a study by Malatest (2010) states:

Programs should solicit the input of the communities they intend to serve. Program designers should work within the Aboriginal community to nurture an environment that supports and encourages students to continue their PSE. This includes identifying the role models within the community and soliciting the support of Elders to counsel students both within the community and on campus. ... Programs should be designed to meet the needs of the local population.

Malatest further highlights the "promising practice" of building networks between post-secondary institutions, communities, and local high schools to recruit students from within communities.

Finally, in order to be effective, collaboration must be equal, shared, and integrated into the core activities of the institution, and institutions and communities must together identify and nurture champions who will advocate for relevant change.

2.6 Opening the Doors to More Students

2.6.1 *Flexible and Relevant Admissions Practices*

As discussed in detail at the Queen’s Conference on Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education (cited in Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011), increasing transitions to PSE requires institutions to consider “the need to veer from conventional approaches and develop admissions approaches for a broad range of students,” including those who do and do not meet the conventional admissions criteria.

As described above, many Aboriginal post-secondary candidates do not follow the conventional route to PSE. Therefore, access routes at various stages of the educational process are necessary to open doors to prospective non-sequential students who may not have transitioned right after grade 12. Special accommodations could also open doors to Aboriginal students who do not immediately demonstrate the skills, course completions, or grade point standing needed to satisfy the rising entry requirements of post-secondary institutions. As noted by Restoule et. al. (2013), applications used for admission to many post-secondary institutions generally centre around the transcript, but when the transcript is interpreted as representing the student’s full reality, the result is that fewer Aboriginal students are admitted. It is important, instead, to “dig for context” to yield insight into what is behind the transcript alone, and to consider broader, more adaptable and relevant admissions procedures.

Recognizing the need for flexible admissions approaches, however, does not diminish the concerns that might be related to this issue. The Oliver et. al. (2013) study explored the issue of admissions requirements, noting that the participants in the study believed that entry policies should be flexible, but also suggesting that negotiating on behalf of students who are not sufficiently equipped is not always in the best interest of candidates. While some study participants suggested that more flexibility would capture students with potential but not necessarily high marks, others felt that challenges associated with this type of approach should be carefully considered in order to promote long-term success for students; it is important to show flexibility while not setting up potential students for failure. In fact, when students who are not adequately prepared are accepted for PSE without adequate support, they will potentially share their adverse experiences with others, negatively impacting their own self-esteem, as well as their peers and communities. Collaborative discussion about the need to balance flexibility with relevant criteria to help ensure student success is key.

Presenters at the Queen’s conference also discussed a number of strategies to assess the potential of students and help prepare them for success, including building relationships and personal connections with prospective students and communities prior to the application process. Institutions need to understand the applicant’s experience and hear each applicant’s story in order to ensure a continuum of supports, which may include help with the application process, as well as funding, academic bridging, and housing assistance. Prior Learning Assessment – a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning acquired

through formal and informal study – was highlighted as a possibility by some of the October 2013 Forum participants, and is also highlighted in the literature as an effective mechanism for facilitating the entry of Aboriginal students. Further, if the admissions process requires interviews, including the Aboriginal student services staff in the interviews can show greater cultural sensitivity and openness and also connect potential students to needed supports even before they are admitted.

2.6.2 Bridging Programs

In addition to admissions flexibility, it is also important to provide specific supports to Aboriginal students who require upgrading and orientation opportunities in order to meet post-secondary demands and requirements, including subject support in writing, math, or science. Improving literacy and numeracy skills has proven especially vital to improving the success rates of Aboriginal PSE students, and mature students in particular may bring a wealth of relevant work and life experience with them, but they often need explicit instruction to develop the academic, study and life skills that will enable them to succeed.

In response, Aboriginal students and communities increasingly are calling for programs under a variety of labels — university and college entrance programs, access programs, transition programs, or bridging programs. For simplicity, these opportunities are referred to as bridging programs in this paper. Overall, the proliferation of such programs indicates the significant need for student upgrading options, and suggests that the programs are making a difference in preparing people for further studies (RCAP, 1996).

Bridging programs usually involve Aboriginal Elders and advisors, and they may offer some or all of the following types of supports: academic upgrading, degree and non-degree credit courses, counselling, peer mentoring, soft-skills training (eg. test taking), as well as planning advice with regard to course selection and future employment. Offering academic and life skills courses as soon as possible provides those students who need assistance with a strong foundation to improve their performance in all of their other courses later in their educational careers (Malatest, 2010). Often, students in bridging programs spend one or more term together while they become accustomed to the university experience, building networks of support and helping students to find the right academic fit (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011).

For example, University of British Columbia (UBC) Okanagan offers an opportunity for Aboriginal students to access university study while not being required to meet the usual admission requirements of UBC. Aboriginal Access Studies prepares students for degree studies by allowing them to register in a specific set of university level courses. The access program is designed for recent high school graduates or mature students, including those who would like additional support as they step into University and those whose grades do not reflect their academic potential. Students in this program register in three university credit courses per term. Each course consists of three hours per week of lecture plus an addition hour of tutorial. The students also receive

academic, personal, cultural, and physical support. Aboriginal Access Studies students attend classes alongside UBC Okanagan degree students, are evaluated according to the same standards and earn the same university recognized credits. Core courses include writing, English, math, and Indigenous Studies. At the end of the program, students can apply to a degree program with a minimum of six courses (18 credits) if they earn a minimum of 60% in each course.

Further, UBC's Okanagan campus works in partnership with the En'owkin Centre to also have Aboriginal Access Studies at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, BC. As part of this relationship, the En'owkin Centre also offers the Okanagan language classes at UBC's Okanagan campus. These courses receive transfer credit and can be used towards a second language requirement.

Important components of the program include the following.

- There are no prerequisites to be enrolled
- University level courses are offered from an Aboriginal perspective, such as using the medicine wheel in math
- Each first-year class comes with mandatory tutorials, which increases the students' chances of succeeding
- Aboriginal Access Studies students come from a broad range of backgrounds
- Aboriginal Access Studies students, who would not have otherwise qualified, have been accepted into degree programs at UBC
- The program has a dual intake in September and January of each calendar year
- Aboriginal Access Studies students meet the full-time course load requirements for BC and Canada student loans (<http://www.ubc.ca/okanagan/students/aboriginal/access.html>).

The Saanich Adult Education Centre (SAEC) and Camosun College also promote the Indigenous College Prep (ICP) and Indigenous Human Services Career Access (IHSCAP) programs to support and prepare potential students to access the admission requirements they need to enter other college programs and pursue university-level studies or careers in the field of human services. Both ICP and IHSCAP are delivered primarily in community at the Saanich Adult Education Centre, part of the W̱SÁNEĆ School Board located on the Tsartlip First Nation near Brentwood Bay. One course is held at Lansdowne campus in the winter semester, offering students an opportunity to experience college life on campus. For some courses, students from both programs come together to receive help and guidance from learning skills and career readiness specialists, Aboriginal advisors and Elders. In addition to increasing academic skills, students have opportunities to explore their strengths and gifts as they develop realistic personal, career and educational goals. Students are encouraged to build on their self-awareness and pride as Aboriginal people as they discuss issues, challenges and opportunities impacting First Nations communities. While examining Indigenous history and culture, students receive guidance through circles and Elders' teachings (www.camosun.ca).

In a review of promising practices for increasing Aboriginal student participation in post-secondary, Malatest (2010) highlights the critical role of bridging programs, and the need to promote the programs through specific events and in-person communications. Malatest also suggests that institutions that are launching or continuing Aboriginal bridging programs should consider supplementing them with childcare services to ensure program uptake, and should build partnerships between the programs and other initiatives in the institution. Further, efforts must be made to remove any stigma from bridging programs, on the part of both students and the broader post-secondary institution community. Otherwise, the transitioning students will feel disheartened and less self-confident as a result of their willingness to access necessary supports – which is opposite to the intended outcome.

Finally, whether students are applying for either a bridging program or any other post-secondary program, the application and admission process needs to be understandable and “user friendly” (Malatest, 2011), and direct assistance should be available to students who find the forms and procedures discouraging.

2.7 Relevant Course Content in Post-Secondary

While the October 2013 Forum was intended to focus specifically on transitions, both the participants and related literature emphasize the inseparable link between activities to support transitions and support for retention and graduation. Many of the same factors will attract more Aboriginal students to post-secondary institutes, and then encourage them to remain. As Kachuk Rosenbluth (2011) states, “barriers for Aboriginal students do not disappear once a student has been accepted to a post-secondary institution,” and “the programs that support transitions to post-secondary education are often necessary throughout the student’s learning experience.”

For example, many Aboriginal students will seek out and subsequently stay at post-secondary settings that they perceive as relevant and reflective of their realities and values. The 2013 Forum participants noted the importance of Aboriginal students recognizing themselves in institute curricula and materials, and research shows that “students should be provided with a sense of pride in their own culture through the development of course materials that are culturally relevant and culturally sensitive” (Malatest 2010). This issue was further discussed at the Queen’s Conference (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011), where it was noted that “compounding the academic challenges [for Aboriginal students] are the psychological and cultural remnants of colonization, which have left many Aboriginal students lacking knowledge of their culture and identity – alienating them from their own people as well as from the mainstream culture on campus.” Efforts, therefore, must develop and build Aboriginal student identity and cultures, as “student services and support programs are an important aspect of any strategy, but they are only part of the picture. ... Curriculum and instruction play an equally critical role, and are more closely tied to the intellectual purpose of the institution” (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011).

According to Oliver et. al. (2013), participants in their project stressed the need for students to find a personal connection to their course content to maintain their motivation and a willingness to apply themselves. Aboriginal issues and perspectives are relevant to a range of programs, and there should be more thoughtful and meaningful acknowledgement of Aboriginal heritage and/or contexts in a range of settings. In addition to the creation of Aboriginal Studies programs and departments, there is much more post-secondary institutions can do, such as implementing mandatory courses that demonstrate respect for an understanding of Aboriginal values. For example, in the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, which is located on traditional Algonquin territory, orientations for all new law students begin with Algonquin teachings and an introduction to Algonquin spirituality. Indigenous legal principles have also been incorporated into the conventional common law curriculum.

The Queen's Conference (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011) participants also discussed in detail the need for increased "indigenization of the curriculum." At that event, Larry Chartrand from the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa discussed the legal obligations that result from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, highlighting the right of Indigenous students to participate in education, their right to dignity of cultural knowledge, and their right to cultural compatibility and inclusion.

2.8 Professional Development for Instructors and Institute Staff

Related literature also echoes numerous comments shared by the October 2013 Forum participants that underlined the need for professional development for post-secondary instructors and administrators.

According to Oliver et. al. (2013), there is a need for all university teaching staff to engage in professional development workshops to enhance their awareness of Aboriginal history and culture. When instructors are able to identify policies and events that have affected Aboriginal people, class discussions can be enhanced and classes will be more respectful of all students. Awareness of these issues can establish a 'commonality' with Aboriginal students, make the content more relevant and meaningful to them, and extend the understanding of non-Aboriginal students about Aboriginal history and contemporary experiences. Being aware of Aboriginal history and culture is also important to enable instructors to recognize and respond to the learning needs of many Aboriginal students, and to address stereotypical opinions of Aboriginal students – which often reflect a negative, deficit view.

Oliver et. al. (2013) suggest that academic staff should receive training on how to develop rapport with students, how to provide support, and how the demands of family responsibilities can affect Aboriginal students. While Aboriginal families can be a source of strength, commitment to family also imposes challenges for time-poor students. As one student noted, family comes with

“responsibilities we can’t avoid,” so taking time out for funerals and other important family matters is not optional. But instructors and staff may fail to recognize that Aboriginal students have little choice in how they prioritize their time when urgent family matters arise.

Oliver et. al. (2013) also raise the importance of post-secondary staff understanding some of the unique characteristics of many Aboriginal learners in Australia, which can influence the way they behave in classes. For example, in their study, Aboriginal students and staff members reported that many students experience “shame” in a larger context, especially when they are expected to ask questions and offer opinions in tutorials. The term “shame” is used by Australian Aboriginal English speakers in reference to the embarrassment or shyness they feel when they become the object of positive or negative attention, particularly in the presence of people in positions of power, such as educators, police officers or employers. Individuals often respond by becoming reticent or silent. They may also simply avoid potentially shame-inducing situations. Indeed, while some students manage to adapt and get beyond this feeling in their PSE experience, others are unable to do so. For example, some students may feel too much “shame” to contribute to online discussion boards or hand in completed assignments, putting their success at risk. If this situation was more broadly understood, efforts could be made to mitigate the effects.

Other generalizations based on research may be made regarding unique characteristics of many Aboriginal students – keeping in mind that all Aboriginal students are individuals and must be understood according to their own unique circumstances, strengths, and experiences.

Some Aboriginal students may be less inclined to speak unless they have had time to think, as many Aboriginal students believe that words have power and should be respected (Swisher, 1997). Many Aboriginal young people are taught that a quick response indicates that a question is not worthy of consideration, and that when confronted with unfamiliar situations it is useful to take time for careful observation. Pewewardy (2002) also notes that many Aboriginal students tend to be reflective thinkers – delaying a conclusion until all evidence is collected and carefully considering the answer to a problem before responding. In other words, there may be a difference in the time students contemplate before arriving at conclusions. In fact, the pause time for non-Aboriginal people is generally less than two seconds, while the pause time for Aboriginal peoples is usually about four or five seconds (Alberta Education, 2005). Because of this difference, Aboriginal students may find it difficult to take part in class discussions in which others jump into the conversation as soon as the previous speaker has finished.

In addition, it is not uncommon for Aboriginal students to spend more time watching and listening and less time talking than other students – and this behaviour can be misperceived as passivity, disinterest, or lack of motivation (Pewewardy, 2002). Instead, instructors (and others) can strive to accept silence, listen as well as talk, avoid excess verbalization, and be direct and to the point.

Instructors and other staff also should be aware of proximity and other non-verbal preferences. How close is comfortable? How is eye contact interpreted? Some Aboriginal students may not like

to be "spotlighted" in front of a group. It is also critical that staff promote relaxed communication so all students are comfortable asking questions without hesitation.

Aboriginal students may experience difficulties when non-Aboriginal students and staff display a lack of knowledge about Aboriginal issues, and it is important to ensure that staff understand that Aboriginal students can experience tensions in response to the Aboriginal content in their courses. Student and staff participants in the Oliver et. al. (2013) study indicated that lecturers and non-Aboriginal students unfairly expect Aboriginal students to be spokespersons for all Aboriginal society and to openly share information about their culture – and the cultures of other Nations.

Although some students saw this as an opportunity to teach others about their culture, others indicated that they feel ill at ease doing so. One student noted feeling torn between knowing that one Aboriginal person cannot speak for others, and feeling a desire to educate non-Aboriginal tutors and students about Aboriginal experience. Most often though, they don't have the knowledge (or the permission) to speak for all Aboriginal people.

In fact, instructors must make every effort to avoid "pan-Indianism" – that is an overgeneralization that suggests all Aboriginal peoples are alike. As stated by Brent Stonefish (cited in Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011), non-Aboriginal people must be urged to understand that "Indian people are the same and different, at the same time."

These issues are explored in an innovative "What I Learned in Class Today" project developed by the First Nations Studies Program at UBC. That research project explores difficult discussions of Aboriginal issues that take place in classrooms at the University, recognizing that students frequently report troubling and sometimes traumatic discussions of cultural issues in class. These situations often affect their ability to function in their coursework, and even their ability to return to class. The project examines how the challenges related to talking about race work as an educational barrier at the classroom level. As the project web site states:

This is something that has not been sufficiently addressed in educational institutions, and yet, is something that desperately needs to be discussed. ... Classrooms, especially classrooms at major institutions like UBC, are becoming increasingly diverse and require attention in order to have effective cross-cultural discussions. This project works to improve the conversations around politically and culturally sensitive issues in a classroom by asking: how does cultural communication happen in a classroom, and how can it be improved?

The UBC project examines the experiences of students, instructors, and administrators at the university to make these problems visible, to better understand how difficulties arise, and to find

ways to have more professional and productive classroom discussions
(www.whatilearnedinclasstoday.com)

Finally, a range of other teaching and learning strategies have been identified as particularly effective in teaching Aboriginal students, as follows.

- Create a relationship and develop rapport with students
- Be honest with students, telling them 'how it is' in terms of the amount of effort and quality of work expected.
- Be conscious about what you say; how you say it; how students respond; and how you present yourself.
- Show genuine passion about what you are teaching.
- Use plain language whenever possible.
- Use a variety of teaching/learning styles.
- Provide context to ensure students understand the relevancy of the activity.
- Use examples to illustrate concepts, tease out bigger macro issues, or explore them further.

Overall, the Oliver et. al. (2013) research report includes:

Recommendation 1

Universities should require all staff to engage in professional development to make university learning environments more culturally inclusive for Aboriginal students. Such professional development programs should include components that would:

- Enhance staff awareness, understanding and sensitivity to the history, culture and contemporary experiences of Aboriginal Australians;
- Promote the adoption of pedagogical strategies that address Aboriginal student learning styles;
- Ensure that educators understand (and discuss with all students in relevant courses) that individual Aboriginal students cannot be expected to represent their society in general and should not be called on to do so; and that Aboriginal students may be unable to respond appropriately to all questions about Aboriginal issues and therefore should not be expected to do so;
- Provide strategies that enable staff to educate their students about cultural sensitivity and inclusivity as a means to pre-empt and/or confront forms of covert and overt racism that occur in their classes;
- Provide staff with the skills to raise the cultural safety awareness of all students at the university.

That study also recommends that academic staff should be supported in making informed decisions about students' progress and outcomes. The researchers suggest that staff should

assess the work of Aboriginal students according to university guidelines, because students assessed either more or less leniently will be ill-prepared for future employment and this inadequacy will invariably manifest itself later, causing high levels of stress. However, appropriate assessments must be complemented with pro-active support. And of course all assessments and communications with students need to respect the student's privacy, be ethical and take place in a culturally appropriate manner.

However, requiring related professional development can be met with resistance, and it can be challenging to ask instructors to change their approaches and long-held perspectives. This concern raises the need to meet staff and student resistance head-on in professional development programs and course units by making the content relevant and discussing how such knowledge advances their skills (Oliver et. al., 2013). Instructors in post-secondary institutions must understand that a lack of basic skills in managing cross-cultural conversations "can be devastating for Aboriginal students." Based on this understanding, UBC, for example, has established training programs for current and incoming faculty to develop capacity in this area. The University of Victoria also has developed a cultural sensitivity training module for staff and faculty who work with Aboriginal students, which has been said to be "an important and valuable model" (Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011). Camosun College offers the award-winning Teltin Tte Wilnew (Understanding Indigenous People) program, which "provides insight into an Indigenous world view, describes the impact of colonization and how it affects students attending the college today, and guides participants in the development of new teaching and learning methods." (<http://web.camosun.ca>)

However, despite the development of these innovative types programs in a variety of settings, many of the opportunities remain voluntary and some institutions have met challenges in ensuring that instructors and staff participate. Therefore, the discussion of such initiatives, and whether they should be mandatory, warrants greater discussion.

2.9 Local Delivery

A clear theme in the October 2013 Forum feedback relates to the importance of locally available post-secondary programming, either through better-supported Aboriginal institutes or through locally-delivered courses and programs.

2.9.1 *Aboriginal-Controlled Institutes*

To begin, the need to adequately support Aboriginal institutes was emphasized by RCAP (1996) almost two decades ago:

Aboriginally controlled post-secondary institutions of all types offer programs valued by Aboriginal communities and they provide a supportive environment that

encourages students to persist with their studies. The number of such colleges and institutes continues to multiply, but they share two serious problems: chronic lack of funding and the reluctance of mainstream post-secondary institutions and professional organizations to recognize their courses and the degrees or certificates they offer.

A study on Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates (R.A. Malatest, 2002) also supports assertions regarding the importance of Aboriginal controlled institutes. That study identified community delivery as a way to bridge the gap that is often caused by the necessity of relocating to urban or distant schools, and to promote community awareness by faculty and staff. Community-delivery also has been shown to promote better recruitment of often under-represented groups, such as Aboriginal people in northern and remote communities.

The range of benefits and challenges associated with Aboriginal-controlled institutes are thoroughly examined in a policy background paper published by FNEESC in 2008, the overall findings of which are described below.

Aboriginal institutes play a critical role in assisting Aboriginal students in moving to mainstream, public institutes. Many students who enrol in locally-offered programs are assisted with the development of their skills, confidence, and awareness of post-secondary opportunities. The students receive career counselling and are encouraged to develop short and long term learning plans that articulate goals with achievable completion schedules. Students in Aboriginal institutes are also advised of prerequisite requirements that must be met prior to transitions elsewhere.

In addition, Aboriginal institutes support students in achieving important non-academic goals. These factors can include improved self-confidence, better parenting skills, preparation for and an opportunity to act as a role model for other community members (including their children), and a better ability to make community contributions. As noted in a 2005 Storytellers et. al. report, "it is evident that the programming offered by Aboriginal-controlled institutes is often beyond developing skill sets for individual advancement and is frequently more directed to training individuals within the context of the common good for the community."

Further, Aboriginal institutes recognize that an education with a strong cultural foundation is critical for student success and community growth. Therefore, cultural activities and values are integrated into the fabric of the institutes, from the boardroom to the classroom. Aboriginal institutes are often at the forefront of efforts to retain and revitalize Aboriginal languages, and many of the institutes offer formally accredited language teacher education courses. As a respondent in the Storytellers et. al. (2005) survey stated, "we need leaders, philosophers, thinkers, medicine people, all sorts of training that doesn't need to be in any college or university and never will be. Other public institutions do not have the right or the tools to teach our languages – they are not pedagogically about us."

Also, other courses and curricula in Aboriginal-controlled institutes are reviewed for their cultural content and often modified to make them more sensitive and relevant to Aboriginal learners. Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are incorporated into curriculum development and delivery in Aboriginal institutes, and the general atmosphere of the programs is relevant to Aboriginal learners. The institutes' instructors understand and respect cultural practices, such as protocols associated with funerals and community events, and they build upon students' preferred learning approaches. Seabird College, for example, designs programs for learners who require tactile, hands-on training to complement their in-class course work, and offers programs at a low-cost in fields that are in-demand in the current economy. The result of efforts such as these are appropriate and respectful learning environments for students.

Another critical component of Aboriginal institutes' design and success is their emphasis on providing students with an extraordinary level of support. As indicated above, some Aboriginal students require special support because of personal and home issues, and because of the unique issues facing Aboriginal communities generally. As RCAP (1996) notes:

Aboriginal programs often include elements that strengthen Aboriginal identity and self-esteem and build support networks among the students. These elements appear to be essential components of successful programs. They begin to heal the wounds the individual has accumulated over years of failed schooling, and they establish a stronger basis for the individual to pursue further training and education.

Aboriginal institutes provide individual support for students, teach courses in life-skills and Aboriginal language and culture, and arrange peer, community and distance mentors. Staff at Aboriginal institutes understand the challenges and problems faced by students, support constructive behaviour changes, and above all create environments that respect the safety and care of each individual. Generally, the personal and academic needs of students are well known as their learning progresses and if challenges arise.

Student support is also provided by Aboriginal institute staff in practical ways, including, as possible, the provision of computers for student use, tutoring services, a study room for students, on-site counselling, and Elder involvement to allow students an opportunity to discuss cultural and spiritual issues. Aboriginal institutes have strong ties with their local Aboriginal communities, Elders and resource people, and they collaborate with these groups in designing and delivering cultural programs (RCAP, 1996). In many communities, an interagency support network for students is provided and may include medical, social, psychological and financial interventions or support as needed. Personal attention to each student is a key to providing whole growth and reinforcement of self-identity and self-esteem leading to positive outcomes. Some institutes also offer part-time work to help students financially.

Aboriginal institutes support students by providing as much flexibility as possible, including scheduling classes appropriately and assessing students upon entry to determine their starting point so that they can begin studying at the level that is right for them. For many students, such flexibility is necessary for them to “get a foot back into education.” Additionally, Aboriginal institutes generally have small classes, which provide students with good access to instructors and student services. This environment makes students feel less intimidated than they would in mainstream institutes and also allows for a supportive relationship amongst students. The staffs of the institutes provide emotional encouragement and a friendly, safe, welcoming, and comfortable environment. The institutes have been referred to as healing spaces, where students who have suffered a history of racism and other problems can get the support they need. Family-like relationships develop between students, instructors, and Elders-in-Residence, and there is an overall a sense of belonging and understanding.

In fact, many students have indicated that they would not have enrolled in a post-secondary program if it were located in a different location, as family and work responsibilities would make a move impossible. Also, many students initially need the comfort of studying near home and benefit from a concerted effort to celebrate learner success; prior to enrolling in an Aboriginal institute they lacked the confidence needed to undertake new studies while also making a major life move to another mainstream institute or to work. Generally, the development of students’ self-confidence, self-discipline, and awareness will help them achieve success in whatever they choose to do, which will ultimately make them stronger community members.

However, although they occupy a distinctive sector in PSE, the majority of Aboriginal institutes are struggling for recognition of the important work they do. Aboriginal institutes do not have access to secure, long-term funding; most are funded on a program-by-program basis only, sometimes for only three months at a time. Base funding to cover infrastructure and administrative costs and capital funding to provide safe, healthy learning environments is generally unavailable.

Because of limited funding, the institutes cannot always offer an ideal range of courses and/or only the beginning of a program. This means that students who want to finish a program must transfer to another post-secondary institution. While this structure may work well for some students, it can present challenges for students who would prefer or who can only afford to complete their education closer to home. Other challenges presented by limited funding include a lack of resources for curriculum development, most specifically for efforts to include culture in the programming. The institutes generally have limited computer, library, and learning resources, and most of the programs offer few services or accommodations for students with special needs.

RCAP (1996) summarizes the funding difficulties of Aboriginal institutes by stating:

Aboriginal post-secondary institutions live on precarious federal and provincial funding; they depend on small program grants, which are short-term, often project-specific and always subject to change. This instability unsettles operations and

makes long-term planning difficult. Aboriginal post-secondary institutions must be recognized and given stable funding.

In addition to greater recognition and funding, RCAP (1996) acknowledges that while Aboriginal institutes play a unique role in the education of Aboriginal adults and have shown durability and resilience, they will not supplant the services of non-Aboriginal institutions, which many Aboriginal students will continue to attend. Canadian post-secondary institutions provide a wide range of programs that Aboriginal post-secondary institutes cannot possibly replicate. At the same time, Aboriginal institutes offer an environment that supports student success and programs that reflect the distinct perspectives and values of Aboriginal peoples, which mainstream institutions cannot offer in the same way. Reflecting this reality, in its Aboriginal PSE and Training Policy Framework, the Ministry of Advanced Education commits to working with the federal government to explore mechanisms to mutually support Aboriginal institutes. (see p. 26).

Their respective strengths and unique contributions suggest that cooperation between Aboriginal and mainstream educators and institutions will be essential. With the expansion of e-learning opportunities, possibility for cooperation will also grow. Significant benefits can result from exchanging ideas and programs to better support Aboriginal learners in all PSE settings. Aboriginal institutes also have much to share in terms of knowledge related to cultural sensitivity that would be useful to public and private educational institutes that serve Aboriginal students. With greater cooperation and respect, programs can be made more effective and relevant for Aboriginal students and collaboration can lead to more culturally appropriate career counselling, as well as better student, course, and program assessment tools.

2.9.2 Community-Based Delivery

In the absence of an Aboriginal-controlled institute, it can be very beneficial when public post-secondary institutes and Aboriginal communities collaborate to implement programs locally, and Aboriginal students will ideally have access to programs that minimize the time spent outside their communities, as these are very attractive to many students (particularly those who live in remote areas). Also valuable are modular programs of study that allow Aboriginal students to earn seasonal livelihoods (Malatest, 2010), and blended approaches can work well for some students, such as having students physically attend a distant, mainstream institute for several weeks to meet with instructors and make new friends, followed by delivery of course content through teleconference, videoconference, or on-line.

Distance education and local programming can reduce financial risks for students, as relocation costs are avoided. Culture shock and isolation are almost eliminated, and financial responsibilities and childcare issues are minimized – which is a significant benefit given how often these issues are highlighted as a serious barrier to PSE. Even limited duration programs in communities can provide students with a successful, confidence-building experience in the short-term, which may

secure longer-term interest in other post-secondary studies. Also, studying close to home may encourage some graduates to stay in their communities following graduation and contribute their skills to community capacity development.

Reflecting these benefits and challenges, the second goal of the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education is “community- based delivery of programs is supported through partnerships between public post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal institutes and communities.” Further, this goal is being advanced, in part, through the Aboriginal Community-Based Delivery Partnerships Program, which was launched in August 2012 to provide post-secondary education and training in Aboriginal communities through partnerships between communities or Aboriginal-controlled institutes and public post-secondary institutions.

2.10 Aboriginal Student Centres

A range of literature supports the feedback from the October 2013 Forum participants indicating the importance of dedicated spaces for Aboriginal learners, particularly when those spaces offer counselling and a range of other services, events, and supports (Toulouse, 2010). This finding complements a key element of the *2007-2010 BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy*: the establishment of Aboriginal Gathering Places – culturally welcoming spaces – on 24 public post-secondary institution campuses. The BC Gathering Places initiative provided capital funding support to assist public post-secondary institutions in developing infrastructure that reflects Aboriginal cultures and traditions. This initiative was intended to provide a welcoming environment for Aboriginal learners and decrease their sense of isolation.

A 2007 evaluation of that Strategy (Jothan, 2011) indicated that the establishment of Gathering Places on the campuses of BC’s post-secondary institutions has been a very positive development, with respondents consistently identifying Gathering Places as one of the most important symbols of positive change at public post-secondary institutions. The facilities bring together resources in a common space that eases access to student support services. The spaces are also seen as a valuable source of inspiration to Aboriginal staff. In addition to capital funding to create these spaces, however, adequate ongoing funding is required to ensure that meaningful supports and programming are being offered for students.

Accordingly, among the Actions included in *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education is:

2. Ensure that capital projects at public post-secondary institution campuses consider the need for culturally welcoming places for Aboriginal learners and that

Aboriginal learners and communities are involved in the design and use of these places.

3. Work with Aboriginal post-secondary partners to develop and share leading practices regarding the use of Aboriginal Gathering Places.

Malatest (2010) also reviewed programs in place in Ontario post-secondary institutions to support Aboriginal students' access and retention, and found that Aboriginal "student centres" are clearly necessary, as they can provide "a sense of belonging and guidance to students who may find that the university environment is very different from, or alien to, environments in which they had previously lived." The centres can make the transition to PSE and, in some cases, city life easier, and often they provide culturally sensitive support by ensuring that Aboriginal counsellors are available and by organizing traditional events that may involve drumming and dancing. It appears that the centres consistently strive to create warm and supportive environments where students feel comfortable engaging with their peers and forming friendships. Other vital services offered by the centres include some combination of sharing information about scholarships and bursaries, facilitating mentoring and academic tutoring, providing food banks and childcare resources, assisting with barriers such as isolation, racism and health issues, and generally helping students navigate through the university system. Whatever services the centres are able to provide, they all present a much-needed meeting space that encourages dialogue about Aboriginal affairs.

Oliver et. al.'s (2013) study of Aboriginal Student Centres in Australian universities also supports the usefulness of specific places for Aboriginal students. For example, the majority of students involved in that study reported that they used Aboriginal centre support services, and many gave them very positive reviews, often describing their services as "essential." The students indicated that centre support staff members are generally very helpful with struggling students. Mature age students appeared to benefit most from the centres, as the spaces ease those students into the routine of studying by allowing them to interact with educational support staff. Those students who were able to access sufficient levels of support from a family member or the wider university community reported less need of centre services, but even those who had little day-to-day contact with the Aboriginal student centres reported that excellent support was available when needed.

Of some concern in the Australian study, however, were those students entering university through bridging programs, who tend to remain at the centre, almost excluding themselves from the rest of university life altogether. While this means the students have ready access to support, their transition to the university community of practice is sometimes made more difficult.

In fact, in the Oliver et. al. (2013) study, concerns were raised that Aboriginal student centres might inadvertently hinder students from participating in the wider university community. This can be a particular problem if Aboriginal centres are located on the periphery of campus and/or lack appropriate signage, which reinforces the perception of a segregated "enclave." When centres are

distant from the main campus, it can be difficult for students to connect with the broader university study environment. In contrast, the Jochen (2011) review of Aboriginal Gathering Spaces in BC notes that the visible presence and – in some cases – the prominence of Gathering Spaces helps to elevate the level of understanding about Aboriginal populations and culture. Several of the spaces in BC institutions were constructed in areas adjacent to broader student services and, as a result, other students are more likely to come into contact with Aboriginal culture to a greater extent than would otherwise be the case.

While some Aboriginal students who participated in the Oliver et. al. (2013) research reported feeling more comfortable remaining separate from the general university population, others viewed participation in the university community as an indication of a successful transition, and some concern was expressed about the absence of mechanisms to ensure that those who wanted to integrate into the university community could do so.

In response, several researchers have suggested that it is the responsibility of Aboriginal student centres to facilitate broader student participation, such as organizing opportunities for Aboriginal students to get to know mainstream academic staff and other students. The Oliver et. al. (2013) report, for example, includes Recommendation 2: “Universities should establish mechanisms to ensure that all staff engage with cultural centre staff (and vice versa) in ways that promote Aboriginal student participation in the university community.”

This type of issue was also addressed in the Malatest (2010) study, which found that effective practice for Aboriginal student centres includes working on campus to raise awareness of Aboriginal people, as well as organizing cultural and other social events on and off campus to create networks for Aboriginal students both within and outside the university and college communities. The Malatest report notes that the majority of Aboriginal student centres in Ontario form partnerships with other universities and colleges to give their students access to different or higher-level PSE options. There was a consensus among participants in that study that partnerships and networks are invaluable to students. Examples offered to support this practice were the First Nations House (FNH) at the University of Toronto, which maintains strong connections to the Aboriginal studies academic program, including offering some academic courses on the FNH site. These close connections are seen to enhance connections with professors and to increase utilization of the centre’s services by non-Aboriginal students. At Trent University, the First Peoples House of Learning provides a meeting place for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to interact with Aboriginal faculty, as well as with other Aboriginal students. Malatest found that over half of the institutions reviewed in Ontario serve Aboriginal students only, while the remaining centres offer their services to all students.

Finally, a student panel at the Queen’s Conference on Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education (cited in Kachuk Rosenbluth, 2011) emphasized that student spaces make important contributions to efforts to make Aboriginal students feel welcome, safe and comfortable, but they should not be the only place on campus where Aboriginal students feel they belong; it is also

necessary to find a way to make the overall institute safe and comfortable for everyone, and to make Aboriginal students feel that they belong to the broader campus community.

The matter of appropriate involvement and broader participation is undoubtedly a decision that should be made locally, based upon the perspectives of the Aboriginal communities and students being served. It does; however, appear to be an issue worthy of consideration.

2.11 Support Services

In addition to, and often facilitated through, student centres, there is widespread acknowledgement that direct support services are critical for Aboriginal student success. Oliver et. al. (2013), for example, found through their study that there was unanimous agreement that support for Aboriginal students is essential for their transitions and retention.

A review of promising practices in Ontario Aboriginal post-secondary transition programs suggests that Aboriginal student services programs are located throughout that province, and in each case the size of the institution, the amount of available program funding, the degree of Aboriginal ownership and direction, and the number of Aboriginal students attending the institution “have a profound impact” on what services are offered. While there are some important threads between the programs, it is natural that unique approaches to student support should occur.

In terms of what programs are working well, the relevant literature suggests that support activities should consider the whole of student life, and should be as personal and direct as possible. Negahneewin College, for example, is undertaking unique measures to ensure that its students continue with their education (Malatest, 2010). The College contacts every Aboriginal student who is not retained at the college to determine his or her reasons for leaving and to see how the student might be encouraged to return to school. Often the students who are sought out cite family responsibilities or problems with finding affordable housing as reasons for their dropping out of school, and they view these as insurmountable problems. However, these issues can be overcome; Negahneewin staff members act as student advocates and work toward accessing the necessary supports. Networks of community leaders and Elders are also working to help the students solve their problems.

At the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), Elders play an integral role in providing counselling and support to the students. In addition to their role in the classroom, resident and community Elders are available for individual or group counselling sessions. An emergency fund also is available for students who cannot meet their obligations to cover necessities or essential needs. An NVIT Elders Council can provide emergency resources such as coupons, food vouchers, bus passes, parking passes, etc. up to a maximum of twenty dollars to help students with necessary living needs.

Some institutions provide Aboriginal students with career counselling and work experience opportunities to help ensure their success after graduation, and peer-counselling services are arranged to contribute to higher retention rates. At Seneca College, a SCORE program specifically targets at-risk students who began post-secondary without a grade 12 diploma, which includes one counsellor dedicated specifically to these students and a lap-top lending program that is especially beneficial for single mothers who cannot stay at school after hours to complete their assignments (Malatest, 2010).

Mentoring programs, as described throughout this report, are also widely highlighted as a promising student support practice. At the October 2013 Forum, for example, participants heard from Vernie Clement about the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) Aboriginal Mentor Program, a promising practice that assists new students (first and second year) in making a successful transition into TRU. The program offers training and development for the Aboriginal Mentors who work together in small groups, and mentoring takes place in different forms (one-to-one, groups, events, workshops, etc.) and is based on student needs.

At the University of Victoria, the LE'NONET provides mentorship opportunities for prospective, new, and returning students (www.uvic.ca). The initiative currently includes the *UVic Campus Cousins Program*, which is a peer mentorship program for Indigenous students. It is designed to strengthen connections between Indigenous students on campus and to create opportunities that will help them to succeed. Campus Cousins are upper-level, returning Indigenous students who are trained to provide guidance and assistance to new / first-year Indigenous students on campus in the following ways:

1. Planning and facilitating skill building workshops and campus connection events that offer opportunities for social networking and community building
2. Being available for students to drop in, ask questions, and make connections in the First Peoples House throughout the week
3. Being available and accessible on Facebook and through email for students to ask questions and seek guidance throughout the year

More information about the other components of the LE'NONET program are outlined in Appendix Three.

Additionally, the Vancouver Island University (VIU) Community Cousins Aboriginal Mentorship Program (www.viu.ca) began in 2011 with funding provided by the Counselling Foundation of Canada. The program's goals and objectives are as follows.

1. To increase access and retention of Aboriginal students at VIU; to improve communication and connection between students, elders, community and campus and to enhance skills of student mentors.

2. The mentorship program invites all Aboriginal students to participate in mentorship training with the purpose of developing leadership skills and building community. Mentors assist incoming students in creating and encouraging connections to successfully transition into post-secondary.
3. The role of Elders is to support Aboriginal "ways of knowing and being" in the various programs and practices at VIU, region wide. The Aboriginal mentorship program includes an elder-in-residence that provides guidance and support to the mentors.

The Aboriginal mentorship program also builds capacity for mentors to gain valuable employability skills and career related experience through outreach and mentoring activities.

2.12 Addressing Financial Challenges

As described above, one of the key issues to be addressed in terms of increasing Aboriginal student transition rates is the significant financial barriers facing Aboriginal learners. As stated in the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education:

Investments in Aboriginal learners' post-secondary education are proven to have a significant positive impact on labour force participation, as well as other economic and social outcomes. As British Columbia faces an era of labour market shortages, support for the post-secondary education of the fastest growing segment of the population is a wise investment in British Columbia's future.

Framework GOAL 3

Financial barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education and training are reduced for Aboriginal learners

Further, the report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2011) includes the following.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the federal government invite national Aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal student groups, and Aboriginal students to formally participate in an evaluation of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program through an advisory committee.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the federal government consider ways to ensure Métis and non-status First Nations have access to post-secondary training, and include consideration of the creation of a national scholarship and bursary fund for Métis and for non-status First Nations.

As stated by the Forum participants, “above everything else is funding insufficiency,” and unless this issue is resolved, many Aboriginal students will continue to struggle to make a successful transition to PSE, and to subsequent careers made possible through their higher learning experience.

3. Additional Considerations

The literature reviewed for this paper highlighted the following considerations.

- In addition to the broad themes outlined in this paper, there is a need for specific focus on Aboriginal male students and children in care. As described above, the BC Ministry of Education Aboriginal Student How Are We Doing? Report for 2012/2013 demonstrates that the six-year completion rate for Aboriginal students in BC is 60 percent, while for non-Aboriginal students it is 86 percent. However, for Aboriginal boys, the six-year completion rate is 58 percent. Further, 62 percent of children under a continuing custody order are Aboriginal, and the six-year completion rate for Aboriginal children under a continuing custody order is 34 percent. For male Aboriginal students in care, that rate is a disturbing 30 percent.

Challenges for male students in fact are not limited to Aboriginal students. Overall, there is a growing gap between post-secondary participation rates for men and women, especially at the university level, and that gap seems to be increasing (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2011)).

In response to that problem, the Standing Senate Committee recommends concentrating on factors such as varying high school drop-out rates, and “suggests it is absolutely necessary to intervene earlier in the educational career of boys to affect an increase in the male university participation rate.”

COMPAS Inc. (2005) also found that the vast majority of parents say that they expect their child to graduate from high school and pursue PSE, but parents appear to differentiate between boys and girls in terms of general PSE prospects. In the case where the oldest child is a boy, 86% of parents say it is very likely or likely that their son will go onto PSE, compared to 90% when the first child is a girl. Parents also appear to differentiate between boys and girls when asked to consider the type of higher education to be pursued. Girls are perceived to be more likely than boys to attend university while boys are thought to be more likely to attend community college. These perceptions should be carefully considered when exploring transition efforts for boys.

- The factors outlined in this paper must be supported by systemic change, as opposed to only add-on programs. Post-secondary institutes across the country must become more pro-active in committing to fundamental change, and sustained progress will require the intentional commitment of institution governing bodies and senior administrations to embed their support for Aboriginal education within the institutional structure, strategic plan, and budget. It is also critical that institutions implement monitoring and data collection processes to ensure that strategies are having their intended impacts.

- Bangster (2011) suggests that in allocating limited resources, it is important to decide whether to prepare students for particular career or educational paths, or to provide maximum flexibility to allow students to take advantage of a range of options. Blending career-oriented and academic courses should help students avoid premature career decisions, while enabling them to see the practical application of academic subject matter. Grounding the curriculum in a specific career can lend helpful focus and context to the instruction, but that career should not be cast as a permanent choice.
- Research has shown that sometimes, a special intervention may improve post-secondary outcomes for at-risk students, but not for higher performing students who would have done just as well without it. It may, however, be useful for intervention-type programs to serve students with a range of abilities; otherwise, teachers and students might perceive the intervention programs as remedial efforts for weaker students, which can reinforce negative stereotypes and further undermine Aboriginal students' self-confidence.

Conversely, concerted outreach may be needed to overcome pre-conceptions (by staff and students alike) about the nature of certain courses and the types of students they serve. For example, dual-credit programs, which give students high school and college credits simultaneously, have conventionally enrolled primarily the higher achieving student population. In contrast, outreach methods and counsellor referrals could attract a broader range of participants, ideally changing perspectives by opening up possibilities and encouraging higher expectations for otherwise underserved students (Bangster, 2008).

- Programs do not have to be wide in scope to have a noticeable impact (Malatest, 2010). Meeting a specific need of an identifiable population, such as lap-top lending programs for single mothers, or specific outreach to students who grew up in care, can have a very meaningful result in terms of transitions and retention.
- Programs that enlist the support of Elders are reported to be particularly successful, including initiatives that take place in K-12 schools, on campus, or in communities. The Evaluation of the 2007 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy (2011), for example, commented that one of the programs consistently identified as highly beneficial was the creation or expansion of programs with Elders. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, instructors, and administrators "spoke to the high impact Elders now had in their institutions as mentors, leaders and instructors." In some cases, Elder programs were initially expected to focus primarily on student supports, which they did, but the activities undertaken then proved to be much broader in overall impact.

4. Conclusions and Themes

As demonstrated throughout this Final Report on the October 2013 Aboriginal Student Transitions Forum, there are numerous barriers that are still preventing the levels of Aboriginal student success that are needed. However, there is also reason for optimism.

Widespread efforts are being made to address the multi-dimensional needs of Aboriginal students at all levels of the education system, and important progress is being made. Aboriginal communities are making concerted and effective efforts to promote increased levels of student success. More and more partnerships are being established by Aboriginal communities and educational settings and mainstream education partners. Aboriginal perspectives are being increasingly infused into educational curricula at the elementary and secondary levels. Aboriginal graduation rates in BC's public schools are rising. Post-secondary institutes are undertaking critical efforts to make their campuses more inviting for Aboriginal learners and more reflective of their needs, values, and realities. And successes are being achieved as a result. For example, Restoule et. al. (2013) report that "The good news is that [most student respondents] reported that their university provided support in ways their high schools did not. While 90 percent of respondents reported experiencing racism in their school experiences, approximately two-thirds of respondents reported feeling welcome at their campus."

This report is intended to build upon the efforts being made, by describing the themes raised in the feedback provided by the Forum participants, along with supporting evidence from existing literature and research reports. Those themes are described as follows.

FNESC appreciates the thoughtful responses that the October 2013 Forum participants generously shared through the dialogue and the feedback workbooks. FNESC hopes that this report accurately summarizes the perspectives and ideas that were presented.

Forum Themes

Local Answers Are the Most Effective

Aboriginal youth should not be viewed as a homogeneous population. Therefore, all issues and possible responses should be explored locally, with the Aboriginal students and communities involved. Additionally, the numerous barriers to Aboriginal students' transitions and retention do not lend themselves to a one-dimensional approach. Instead, a combination of collaborative efforts by Aboriginal communities and all levels of the education system are needed.

Additional themes identified through the Forum feedback and literature are highlighted briefly below.

Better academic preparation and higher expectations are needed at the K-12 level

Interventions must begin early, when students are first developing their PSE and career aspirations, and attention must be provided in time to ensure that Aboriginal students pass key “gatekeeper courses,” such as academically rigorous courses at the grade nine level. Students must understand the importance of careful educational and career planning, high school curricula must be rigorous, relevant, engaging, and culturally appropriate, and efforts must be made to meaningfully engage parents and communities. Overall, there must be widely held, higher expectations for Aboriginal students, so that they are provided every opportunity to graduate with the skills and credentials they require for further study and meaningful career options.

Aboriginal elementary and secondary students and their families should receive thorough and relevant counselling, information, and exposure to PSE and career possibilities

Secondary schools can provide specific supports to complement students’ academic preparation, including: early and ongoing counselling; opportunities for students and families to become aware of academic requirements for PSE entrance; and career planning initiatives that are integrated into the school curriculum, rather than offered as add-on activities. Additionally, career planning and PSE promotional and recruitment efforts and materials must be relevant to Aboriginal students, with an emphasis on personal and direct contact and, whenever possible, involving mentoring opportunities and Aboriginal role models.

Personal counselling should also be available to prepare Aboriginal students for the tensions and conflicts associated with the change of environment and expectations of higher education. Aboriginal students should be encouraged to feel that they can fit in to higher education institutions, and to develop images of themselves as people who deserve to and can succeed.

A key issue in regard to counselling and information sharing is the need for greater awareness by Aboriginal students and families of PSE costs and financing options. It is important to address possible misperceptions about the adequacy of PSSSP funding, and Aboriginal youth and families should be encouraged to seek out thorough information about the range of options that might be necessary. Additionally, efforts should be made to build Aboriginal students’ confidence in their ability to qualify for scholarships, and assistance should be available to help students complete required forms.

It also may be beneficial to provide more training for staff who work with Aboriginal students to promote career and education planning, better materials specifically designed to target Aboriginal youth, and clearer information about the types of assistance available for children in care. Also, consideration should be given to the potential benefits of encouraging Aboriginal students to take part in extra-curricular activities, including the need for financial support to make this possible – especially for children in care.

Communities can implement efforts to build student resilience and family capacity

Associated with improved support activities in schools, Aboriginal communities can assist students and families, and can play a key role in helping students develop a strong 'sense of self' as an Aboriginal person. These efforts can build from the understanding that feelings of responsibility to and support from family and community motivate many Aboriginal students to engage in higher education. Therefore, beneficial approaches will reinforce families' capacities to provide support and promote more positive attitudes toward PSE amongst students and their families. Also, opportunities to show community encouragement and celebrate students' successes and transitions are beneficial.

Stronger connections between high schools and post-secondary institutions are needed

All components of the education system have an interconnected role to play in addressing barriers for Aboriginal students, rendering conventional, fragmented approaches unlikely to succeed. Joint planning and strong relationships between high schools and higher learning institutions are very useful, and there should be cooperative efforts to raise awareness about possible opportunities for prospective PSE students, such as orientation programs for high school students, role model programs, community visits by PSE recruitment officers, etc.

In implementing initiatives to connect secondary and post-secondary students and education settings, consideration should be given to the provision of financial support for students who could not otherwise afford to participate in orientation programs and activities, and for students who do take advantage of support activities and then cannot afford to proceed further with their educations.

Connections with communities are a practical and moral imperative

In addition to connections between post-secondary institutions and schools, there is also a need for stronger partnerships between higher learning settings and communities, building upon the rights and responsibilities of families and communities for the education of their people. Educational institutions and communities can develop and sustain formal and informal partnerships for outreach, access, and retention, resulting in local approaches that take into account the priorities and circumstances of communities and the strengths of each institution. Post-secondary institutes should invest adequate time, energy and resources for trust-building and the establishment of respectful relationships.

Initiatives should open doors to more students

Careful consideration should be given to more flexible and creative admissions practices, as new approaches may encourage and capture a broader range of students, including those who do and do not meet the conventional admissions criteria. Collaborative discussions about possible changes are important, however, to ensure an appropriate balance between flexibility and relevant criteria that will ensure student success. Additionally, new admissions approaches should ideally involve

building relationships and personal connections with prospective students and communities prior to the application process, to help ensure that students are appropriately placed.

Specific supports are also needed for Aboriginal students who require upgrading and orientation in order to meet post-secondary demands and requirements, including subject support, literacy and numeracy skills development, as well as life skills and personal preparation for the challenges of PSE. Accordingly, bridging programs are seen as critical to student success, especially when those programs are well connected to other initiatives in the institution.

Whether students are applying for either a bridging program or any other post-secondary program, the application and admission process needs to be understandable and direct assistance should be available to students who find the forms and procedures discouraging.

Relevant course content in post-secondary is a priority

Aboriginal students will seek out and subsequently remain at post-secondary settings that they perceive as relevant and reflective of their realities and values. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that course materials are culturally relevant and sensitive, as students need to find a personal connection to the curriculum in order to maintain their motivation and a willingness to apply themselves.

An emphasis on professional development for instructors and institute staff would be beneficial

There is a need for all university teaching staff to engage in professional development workshops to enhance their awareness of Aboriginal history and cultures, as greater understandings can enhance class discussions and promote classes and environments that are more respectful of all students. Instructors should be able to recognize and respond to the learning needs of many Aboriginal students, and to address stereotypical opinions of Aboriginal peoples. It is important to ensure that staff understand that some students can experience tensions in response to the Aboriginal content in their courses, including unfair expectations that they can and should be spokespersons for all Aboriginal society.

In considering professional development requirements, it is important to acknowledge and address potential resistance directly, and to promote an understanding that a lack of basic skills in managing cross-cultural conversations “can be devastating for Aboriginal students.”

Local delivery can have significant benefits

Local delivery of post-secondary opportunities through Aboriginal controlled institutes has been highlighted as a critical component of efforts to promote important Aboriginal student transition and retention rates. Community delivery is seen as a way to bridge the gap that is often caused by the necessity of relocating to urban or distant schools, thereby promoting better recruitment. However, although they occupy a distinctive sector in PSE, the majority of Aboriginal institutes are struggling for recognition of and funding for the important work they do. This problem must be

addressed collaboratively. In addition, their respective strengths and unique contributions suggest that cooperation between Aboriginal and mainstream educators and institutions will be essential.

In the absence of an Aboriginal-controlled institute, it can be very beneficial when public post-secondary institutes and Aboriginal communities collaborate to implement programs locally. Distance education and local programming can reduce financial risks for students, as relocation costs are avoided. Culture shock and isolation are eliminated, and financial responsibilities and childcare issues are minimized. Even limited duration programs in communities can provide students with a successful, confidence-building experience in the short-term, which may secure longer-term interest in other post-secondary studies. Also, studying close to home may encourage some graduates to stay in their communities following graduation and contribute their skills to community capacity development.

Aboriginal Student Centres

Both the Forum participants and relevant literature highlight the importance of dedicated spaces for Aboriginal learners, particularly when those spaces offer counselling and a range of other services, events, and supports. Aboriginal student centres can make the transition to PSE easier, and often they provide essential, culturally sensitive support. The centres create warm and supportive environments and provide other vital services, including some combination of sharing information about scholarships and bursaries, facilitating mentoring and academic tutoring, providing food banks and childcare resources, assisting with barriers such as isolation, racism and health issues, and generally helping students navigate through the university system.

The matter of appropriate involvement in the Centres and participation of Aboriginal students in the broader post-secondary setting is a topic that should be discussed locally, based upon the perspectives of the Aboriginal communities and students being served, but it does appear to be an issue worthy of consideration.

Support services

Whether in addition to, or facilitated by, Aboriginal Student Centres, there is unanimous agreement that support for Aboriginal students is essential for their success. A holistic range of support activities should consider the whole of students' lives, including their academic, cultural, spiritual, personal, and financial needs. Further, support mechanisms should be as personal and direct as possible.

Addressing financial challenges

As stated by the Forum participants, in considering barriers to Aboriginal student transitions, "above everything else is funding insufficiency." Unless this issue is resolved, many Aboriginal students will continue to struggle to make a successful transition to PSE and the subsequent careers made possible through their higher learning experience.

Additional Important Considerations

- In addition to the broad considerations outlined in this paper, there is a need for specific focus on Aboriginal male students and children in care. Generally, the Forum participants and the relevant literature seem to suggest that these students require the same types of support as those recommended for all Aboriginal students, but targeted with a specific emphasis on these populations of students.
- The factors outlined in this paper must be supported by systemic change, as opposed to only add-on programs. Sustained progress will require the intentional commitment of institution governing bodies and senior administrations to embed their support of Aboriginal education within the institutional structure, strategic plan, and budget.
- Programs do not have to be wide in scope to have a noticeable impact. Meeting a specific need of an identifiable population can have a meaningful result in terms of transitions and retention.
- Programs that enlist the support of Elders are reported to be particularly successful, including initiatives that take place in K-12 schools, on campus, or in communities.

Appendix One:

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Program

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Program involves a team of 100 staff partnered with 14 Australian universities and the like of Google, Atlassian, Virgin Australia, and Coca Cola, to facilitate mentoring by Aboriginal university students of Aboriginal high school students.

AIME provides a dynamic educational program that gives Indigenous high school students the skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to finish school at the same rate as their peers. AIME also connects students with post Year 12 opportunities, including further education and employment.

Across the country, AIME delivers a range of different programs. The **Core Program** targets local Indigenous high school students who attend schools that are able to visit an AIME partner university campus on a weekly basis. The **Outreach Program** extends the AIME experience to Indigenous high school students from further afield through a more intensive full day format. The following is a snapshot of what the kids receive:

Year 9 'Interactive' Core Program: 15 x 1 hour mentoring sessions at your university campus held weekly (during session time) from April to November. The Year 9 Interactive Program will require you to step outside your comfort zone for sessions such as Art, Drama, Respect and Hip Hop.

Year 10 'Leadership' Core Program: 15 x 1 hour mentoring sessions at your university campus held weekly (during session time) from April to November. The Year 10 Leadership Program includes sessions on Racism, Year 11 and 12 Subject Selection, Résumé Building and Writing your First Speech as Prime Minister.

Year 11/12 Leadership and Development Core & Outreach Program: 4 x full-day sessions delivered at your university campus across the months of April to November (*Starts March on the Gold Coast*). Through a range of interactive facilitated sessions the focus is on Year 12 completion and transition/connection to the next chapter of life.

AIME Tutor Squads: Squads of AIME Mentors will travel to schools during the 15-week program period to provide further academic and personal support for the students. Each site may host up to 5 squads of 5 Mentors.

AIME Outreach Program: AIME will open its doors to Year 9 to 12 students in schools beyond the 30-minute radius of our Core Program and for those who cannot make it onto the University campus each week. Students in the Outreach Program will have the chance participate in 12 AIME sessions spread across 4 full-day visits to the university campus across the months of May to November (*Starts March on the Gold Coast*).

Impact to Date

In 2012 ...

- The year 9 to 12 completion rate for AIME students was 71.2 percent – exceeding the national Indigenous average of 38 percent and approaching the national non-Indigenous average of 79.2 percent.
- The year 9 to university progression rate for AIME students was 22.1 percent – nearly six times the national Indigenous average of 3.8 percent and approaching the national non-Indigenous average of 36.8 percent.

Appendix Two: University of Winnipeg (www.uwinnipeg.ca)

Awards and Financial Aid

The Opportunity Fund

The Opportunity Fund was created in 2007 by the University of Winnipeg to help make it possible for inner-city youth to dream big. Unique among universities in Canada, the Opportunity Fund comes as a direct result of the *Access Task Force on Post-Secondary Education* commissioned by President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lloyd Axworthy. The goal of the University is to build a \$10 million bursary fund that will help ensure access to higher learning, bridge the graduation gap, and transform lives through education.

Fast-Track Bursary Program: The first element of the Opportunity Fund is a bursary program designed to help youth and adult learners who have financial need and are from under-represented groups. The bursaries are intended to assist students with their direct education costs (tuition and books), and are based on the individual financial need of the applicant. So far 1158 bursaries have been awarded to current students at the university and 238 recipients have graduated since 2007.

Eligibility: You may be eligible for this bursary program if you meet the following criteria:

- Have at least a 2.00 (C) grade point average, or a 65% admission average
- Demonstrate financial need
- Belong to a population currently under-represented at the University of Winnipeg such as recent immigrants or refugees, Aboriginal students, adult learners, students from low-income families, students with disabilities, or first generation students (those who are the first in their family to attend college or university).

Tuition Credit Program: Tuition Credits allow you to “earn as you learn.” Students as early as Grade 4 can begin to earn their tuition by staying in school, maintaining good grades, graduating and participating in their community. By the time you earn a high school diploma, the support will be there to help cover your tuition costs at the university.

Value: Tuition credits are deferred awards. Depending on your activities in Grade 4-12, you could potentially earn an award of up to \$4,000 towards your post-secondary education.

Here is how it works:

Grades 4 through 8:

\$150 for each school year completed

\$50 for extra-curricular activities

Grades 9 through 12:

\$500 for each school year completed

\$150 if you get a 70% average or better

\$100 for extra-curricular activities.

Eligibility: To be enrolled in this program, you must be actively involved in one of the following programs:

- The University of Winnipeg Eco-Kids
- Inner City Junior Wesmen Basketball team
- Model School at The University of Winnipeg Collegiate

Youth-in-Care Tuition Waivers: The University of Winnipeg is committed to breaking down the barriers to university education for Youth in Care. The Youth-In-Care Tuition Waiver Program is a part of the Opportunity Fund, and it is intended to cover undergraduate tuition fees. Tuition Waivers are based on the individual financial need of the applicant and will be selected by the Awards and Financial Aid Office in partnership with the Child and Family Service Authorities.

Eligibility: You may be eligible for this tuition waiver if you meet the following criteria:

- Have been given an offer of admission to the University for the upcoming Fall
- Over the age of 18 or turning 18 in the 2013/2014 academic year
- Demonstrate financial need.

Program sponsors include the Province of Manitoba (\$750,000 to \$1,000,000), the Bank of Montreal, Investors Group, Scotiabank, TD Canada Trust, Westland Foundation, CIBC, LaFarge Canada, Manitoba Bluecross, and numerous other foundations, corporations, and individuals.

The University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School

As a community learning initiative, the Collegiate Model School was created to increase high school graduation rates and access to post-secondary institutions. The Model School Program is located on the Campus of the University of Winnipeg Collegiate. Forty students from grade 9-12 attend the program. Students are identified as being bright and capable of university entrance, but have various barriers that prevent them from reaching their potential. We have had twenty-two students graduate since 2008.

The students have been identified by school personnel from a variety of local junior/senior high schools as well as being nominated by non-profit organizations such as Big Brothers & Big Sisters. The students are assessed upon entry into the program for academic skill level, interest and abilities. Each student is then part of the development of an Individualized Education Plan in which goals and objectives are formulated based on their individual needs. It is our goal to provide the opportunity and supports needed to assist the young people to achieve academic success.

The Model School uses Manitoba Provincial curriculums in all subject areas. We use a variety of teaching strategies and methods including direct teaching, self-directed curriculum, integration into Collegiate classes and School Initiated Courses (S.I.C.). The Model School offers innovative, creative and engaging programming with a view to implementing culturally appropriate educational material, teaching practices, and language preservation within the curriculum.

An academic assessment is conducted on all of the students upon entry into the program. This includes testing in reading inventories, math, learning styles and multiple intelligences. Students are supported in a variety of areas including registering for courses, tutorial support for academic subjects, social, emotional, and financial support, and preparation for university entrance.

Students in the Model School program receive a full scholarship and are provided with continued support including transportation costs, nutrition, equipment and materials. Students also receive full enrollment at the Bill Wedlake Fitness Centre located at the Duckworth Centre.

The Model school also offers many extra-curricular activities to extend the school day. These include a variety of sports teams, dance, art, drama, and community development projects. Students are also trained in First Aid and CPR, coaching, refereeing, babysitting and other certifications to promote academic and personal success.

Throughout the school year students participate in leadership initiatives and employment readiness programs. These programs prepare students for summer employment at The University of Winnipeg's Eco-U Summer Camp. Model School students are hired by the University's summer camp to work as Junior and Senior Camp Leaders giving them practical, hands on job experience.

Appendix Three:

University of Victoria LE,NONET (www.uvic.ca)

LE,NONET (pronounced "le-nong-it") is a SENĆOŦEN word that literally means "paddling a canoe in a storm and making it through to the other side. In a more figurative sense, LE,NONET can also be taken to mean "success after enduring many hardships." INAF acknowledges with gratitude and respect the late Earl Claxton Sr. (YELKÁŦŦE), SENĆOŦEN knowledge keeper of the Tsawout First Nation, and Elder John Elliott (STOLŦEŁ), of the Tsartlip First Nation, for sharing this information.

LE,NONET provides a suite of programs designed to welcome and support Indigenous students (status, non-status, Inuit, Métis) throughout their educational journeys at the University of Victoria.

LE,NONET offers a series of courses in conjunction with the [Indigenous Studies Minor](#) program. Interested students can count these courses toward the requirements for an IS minor.

- Preparation Seminar (Indigenous Studies 310, 1.5 units)
- Research Apprenticeship (Indigenous Studies 320, 1.5 units)
- Community internships (Indigenous Studies 321, 1.5 units)

LE,NONET offers a number of student support programs.

Bursaries

LE,NONET bursaries are awarded annually to Indigenous students who demonstrate financial need. Any Indigenous full-time undergraduate student who is in good academic standing (GPA of 2.0 or higher) at the University of Victoria is eligible to apply for a bursary of up to \$3000 annually.

Mentorship Programs

LE,NONET provides mentorship opportunities for prospective, new, and returning students. We currently offer two programs:

The UVic Campus Cousins Program is a peer mentorship program for Indigenous students. It is designed to strengthen connections between Indigenous students on campus and to create opportunities that will help them to succeed.

Campus Cousins are upper-level, returning Indigenous students who are trained to provide guidance and assistance to new/first-year Indigenous students on campus in the following ways:

1. Planning and facilitating skill building workshops and campus connection events that offer opportunity for social networking and community building
2. Being available for students to drop in, ask questions and make connections in the First Peoples House throughout the week

3. Being available and accessible on Facebook and through email for students to ask questions and seek guidance throughout the year

The UVic Campus Connections Program aims to create connections between Indigenous students at UVic and prospective students in local high schools. The program offers Indigenous high school students an opportunity to explore their educational goals and to make connections with UVic students who will share their personal education journeys.

The program provides a series of opportunities that can be customized to meet the needs of each school. These include (but are not limited to):

1. A UVic recruitment information presentation and classroom visit from UVic students with a focus on sharing their personal education experiences.
2. A visit to UVic campus hosted by UVic students, which can include lunch, campus tour and a career exploration activity.

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