

**Report: Improving School Success  
For First Nations Students**

**FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STUDY  
School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)**

**IMPROVING SCHOOL SUCCESS  
FOR  
FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS**

**FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION COUNCIL  
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 73 (KAMLOOPS/THOMPSON)**

## **Report: Improving School Success For First Nations Students**

### **PREFACE**

The First Nations Education Council of School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson) commissioned this study.

The study was prompted by the *Report on First Nations Students (October 1997)*. It showed that when compared with the general population, 20% more First Nations students performed below grade expectations in Grade 7, and 22% were still below grade expectations when tested again in Grade 9. It showed, too, that when compared to the general population, 9.6% more of them selected courses leading to the easier School Leaving Certificates, and that 12% fewer took the courses leading to the more difficult Dogwood Certificate.

The First Nations Education Council asked that factors influencing these problems be identified. They asked that successful programs and practices dealing with First Nations early reading/language and First Nations secondary student retention to be analyzed as to their potential use in this school district, and that recommendations based on the research findings be made.

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## **Report: Improving School Success For First Nations Students**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research did not turn up any comprehensive and successful program models related to the questions pursued, so an examination of causal factors was made with a view to postulating what the characteristics of a successful model might be.

The recommendations in the report are thought to be steps toward more success for First Nations students. However, many of the causal factors are related to the problems deeply rooted in history, society and politics, and are of a kind that are unlikely to be rectified overnight. This does not mean, of course, that they cannot be influenced to some degree by schooling. It was decided, then, to develop a set of goals and to then develop recommendation which might help move toward the goals. Some recommendations are of a kind that can be immediately acted upon with quick results, while others are longer term with changes taking place over time. To this latter end, recommendations are listed in order of priority with those having a more immediate payoff given the highest priority. By doing this, it is hoped that the focus will be on actions that are most likely to ameliorate First Nations student problems soonest.

Research about causes is substantive even if it has not been applied in any controlled way to working educational models. There is no doubt that the continuing inability of First Nations students to succeed within the curriculum context of a public education system is not only related to the effects of cultural dissonance and racial stereotyping, but to other endemic and long standing problems. Economic poverty, lack of school success models within families, and the perceived lack of career opportunities are a few causes just as difficult to rectify as stereotyping. These latter causes are shared by all unsuccessful students, First Nations or not.

For instance, a study done by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1997 compared economically equivalent, small, rural, First Nations and non-First Nations communities. The study showed academic achievement in both communities was much lower than urban communities: both groups being equally affected by their social economic condition. There was one significant difference between the First Nations and the non-First Nations communities: many more First Nations students did not complete school. This tells us that the impact of poverty on academic outcomes is common to all, but what is not common is that the First Nations students are not convinced by either the school system or their

communities that school is useful to them. It may be that First Nations students do not see sufficient career opportunities to justify continuing their education.

A local survey of First Nations secondary students does suggest that their expressed career aspirations are not too dissimilar from the general student population, even if the range of choices is somewhat truncated. First Nations students have their dreams, and express them well. The same survey showed that like most other students, they take full responsibility for their successes and failures at school, tending to blame themselves when things go wrong. One thing not common to the majority population is the larger percentage of First Nations students arriving at secondary school with poor language and mathematics skills, and the difficulty they have with this deficiency. Once again, it is just as likely that unsuccessful non-First Nations students with similar deficits are just as discouraged as First Nations students, and just as often abandon school in spite of their aspirations. As we will note in our report, the data seems to suggest that if the deficit in academic skills were to be rectified, students would more likely hold to their expressed aspirations and stay with school regardless of social and economic factors outside of school.

The report points out, too, that there is research showing that the way schools support First Nations students at risk is not as effective and sensitive to need as teachers believe. A more proactive relationship with First Nations families, a different kind of participation of classroom teachers in the support process, and more flexibility in the application of procedures related to student responsibilities are implied by the research. There are also traditional organizational ways, particularly in secondary schools in need of change if First Nations students, and all other students unable to keep up with school obligations are to stay in the system.

**FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION COUNCIL  
REPORT ON IMPROVING SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR FIRST  
NATIONS STUDENTS**

*This study was commissioned under the belief that there must be successful models of First Nations education which, if found, would obviate the necessity of "reinventing the wheel". Regrettably, no such models seem to exist. What was found was research data on every possible aspect of the problem, data that reveals not only what is going wrong, but what might be done to make them go better. That the problem remains unsolved in spite of a multitude of studies and conferences; tells us that maybe the catch phrases and dialogues that have grown up around the problem, should be put to one side in favour of fresh ones. That the old dialogues have produced little in the way of change suggests that new approaches are in order, dialogues that call up new experiments in classrooms and in First Nations communities. In other words, what is needed is a new invention. For the school district and the communities to strike out on an entirely new path would require not only new insights but a lot of courage. Other paths would seem to only slightly modify and to perpetuate what is. It is time to break from the traditional mold and move on to solutions.*

*There are, however, immediate steps worth taking. Changes that modify the ways schools and teachers respond to academic and social problems would seem to have the quickest payoff for the students. Such changes are well within the understanding of professional teachers. Programs aimed at improving cross-cultural understanding between schools and First Nations students and families should also receive immediate consideration. The research data is put together as an annotated bibliography. The report, itself, is followed by recommendations that were written with the advice and help of a panel composed of nine members of the First Nations Education Council.*

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**The reason why many First Nations students are not successful in school is due to a complex set of factors.** Many of these factors are similar to those any other unsuccessful student would face, factors easily identified by most teacher professionals. The complexity arises when it is found that what was thought to be recognizable, is itself driven by something more puzzling and unique. Therein lies the complexity, and the difficulty of finding easy answers. An example of this is found in the reading problem.

**Statistically, as many as twenty percent of all primary children never become fluent readers, and remain hesitant readers right through school into adulthood.** That First Nations children are more often found with this deficit suggests that even when remedial actions taken by schools and teachers are successful, that there is some additional difference about these children not being taken into account. In some cases frequent family moves and absenteeism can be said to be the reason for the lack of reading progress, but behind these family controlled events are the cultural and economic drivers which prompt them. It is the cultural drivers which teachers must take into account when it comes to reading methods. It is known, for instance, that a direct attack on reading code without a call to the experiential background of the First Nations child is unlikely to succeed. Regrettably, any student who does not acquire reading fluency in the primary grades is not likely to do so in later school years, and is destined to either leave school early or leave with a second-rate certificate.

**Other problems arise out of the social and economic context in which children live.** This relationship between school success and socio-economic factors is well known to educators. Teachers know that the socio-economic status of children greatly handicaps school performance. That this factor influences First Nations communities in much the same way as any other comparable community we might expect. A recent study supports this expectation. An Indian and Northern Affairs study showed that if socio-economic factors are comparatively equal, the impact is all but equal on both First Nations and non-First Nations communities. In both depressed socio-economic communities, academic scores were depressed when compared to the urban norm. However, there was a difference: many more First Nations students in the compared communities dropped out of school than did non-First Nations students. This suggests again, that First Nations students bring a difference to school that is not being accommodated in the school system.

**The experiential background of families is another well-known determiner of school success.** If the family has a tradition of school success, the children are likely to do the same. That many First Nations elders were educationally isolated from the greater community by the residential school process means that academic success of a kind found in the mainstream schooling is a very recent experience for most families. It is not surprising, then, to see that secondary students responding to our local survey, more often than not, limited their career aspirations to those in which many contemporary First Nations adults are now employed. School support workers, social worker, tribal police, counselor, law studies and teachers were often mentioned with references to service to First Nations peoples. Very few of these First Nations students aspired to the broad range of other careers found in our contemporary society. This suggests that either the choices they make are because they are today's First Nations children, or that they feel that other careers are not socially within their reach. It would be

useful to know more about why First Nations students make the career choices they do.

**We know that much of the absenteeism in secondary schools is an attempt to avoid some unpleasant aspect of schooling** If school is not a place where success seems possible, then avoidance answers the resulting frustration. Students not succeeding at school will skip classes, come late and become more often absent until they finally get so far behind they quit. First Nations students do not differ in this respect, and they often leave school when they become totally frustrated in their attempt to be academically successful. In cases where academic success is not the problem, we often see that it is some event outside of school that leads to the absenteeism and an early school leaving. However, that some factor inside the school, a factor other than academic difficulties, might lead to school leaving is much harder for teachers to accept. Yet, if you were to be a First Nations student who couldn't reconcile the cultural ways learned at your mother's knee with those in the mainstream school culture, then the resulting discomfort might very well drive you away. This latter kind of discomfort is hard to detect, but once detected it must be resolved if the minority student is to enter into schooling enthusiastically.

**It must be recognized, too, that studies show that no amount of disciplining for avoidance behaviours will help a student come to terms with an underlying academic deficiency.** If the underlying problem is academic, then it must be dealt with as an academic problem and not a behaviour problem. That parents of such children often don't become party to school decision-making until discipline does become the issue, doesn't help. This belated and negative involvement of the family often spells an end to any opportunity the school had to have the family become a member of the school community and its goals, which closes the door on any further change for the student. Research tells us that there are likely better ways to bring these youngsters around to success.

**Teachers know that there is a direct relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement.** They try to overcome this effect by carefully choosing what they do and say in classrooms. A student's positive self-image becomes difficult to maintain if academic success is the only value the teacher communicates. It is not that First Nations students more often than others have a poor self-image, because apparently they do not. But many do arrive at secondary school without the necessary academic skills, which is bound to make any student feel that success is unlikely, whether they are First Nations or not. Even attempts to help such students can denigrate the self-image if not done with sensitivity, especially in the middle and secondary years of school. But regardless of how sensitive a teacher might try to be, teacher expectations for academically deficient students do reveal themselves, and do negatively influence and discourage students.

**Being part of an often unjustly disparaged minority, First Nations students bring with them the seeds of yet another influence on schooling.** All teachers and students, including the First Nations students, themselves, are bound to be influenced to one degree or another even if they don't hold such prejudices. A well-established attitude rooted in society is hard to change. Regrettably, the research shows that most of the usual culture and racism sensitivity programs have not been too effective. We apparently don't know how to predictably remove prejudice, but at least we can insist upon an overt tolerance of differences. This does not mean we shouldn't try to do more, especially with cross-cultural education. The research provides some clues: prejudice is an attitude, and attitudes result from emotional conditioning. An attitude is unlikely to change unless emotional reconditioning takes place.

**Many First Nations students tell of being alienated by the school system, and say those listening to them do not understand what is being said.** Although unsuccessful students do feel the discomfort of failure, studies show that First Nations students often have different interpretations to what might be thought as everyday school events. These interpretations are derived from the differences that made them who they are, students from a First Nations culture. At other times, the students tell of the discomfort they feel as minority in a majority culture, knowing that others might hold racist and cultural views of them. They feel that more First Nations staff members would be helpful in dissipating some of this alienation. Regardless of the source of the alienation, the concerns need to be heard, and a way must be found to have this more reliably happen. Secondary students in particular are old enough to become partners with their teachers, and ways in which they can be more openly consulted about such things need to be found.

**The inability of majority of the First Nations students to cope with the barrage of homework tasks also came through in our student survey.** Homework is not getting done at home for a variety of reasons. The resulting burden, guilt and frustration they feel, needs the attention of teachers and schools, particularly secondary schools. Failing school gets translated into "not coping with assigned homework tasks". They say that skipping, lateness and absenteeism comes out of the futility of coping with homework. Homework overload because teachers don't schedule assignments in cooperation with others, tasks too difficult to be done by *most* students let alone academically deficient ones, and too much class time spent marking homework instead of teaching what is needed to do homework, are the complaints. None of these things would seem to be outside the ability of teachers and schools to rectify, not only for First Nations students, but for all other students, especially those who are less than successful.

**Although the Ministry of Education advocates the integration of First Nations perspectives and studies from Kindergarten to Grade 12, there is little evidence to show that this is actually happening.** This teacher and that

one acts on this mandated goal, especially in the elementary school, but the plethora of curriculum topics in secondary schools has made compliance difficult. There is now a First Nations Studies Grade 12 elective, but it doesn't serve the need of impressionable junior secondary First Nations students needing validation in a majority culture. The Ministry has a drafted a set parallel topics for insertion into existing curriculum lessons, but they are so comprehensive in depth as to likely be dismissed out of hand by already very busy teachers. What is apparently needed is not more curriculum, but succinct advice as to how First Nations perspectives might more easily be inserted into on-going lesson topics

**Other curriculum topics wanting attention are in the realms of social development, topics that belong in every classroom, both as teacher practice and as a student topic.** Practicing and learning to practice concepts that assure that differences between individuals and groups are respected is rarely successful as a mere chalkboard lesson. And neither will a set of rules posted on the wall do the trick. As was previously noted, studies show that attitudes are emotionally conditioned and will change only if emotions become involved again as educational events. It is a mistake, for instance, to believe that cross-cultural education alone will change attitudes. In fact, at times, cross-cultural education has accented the differences between peoples. It is not enough to replace one set of beliefs with another. Teachers need to know more about how attitudes are learned and how they may be changed. This is important to First Nations students in the minority, but also to students in the mainstream culture. The question will not go away even if easy answers are not readily available, and it is a question that will likely need a new agenda before it will be resolved. What is being done is not working: new insights and methods are needed.

**It has been difficult too, to keep track of the problems First Nations students are having with the school system.** Each question that now arises requires immense effort to isolate and analyze, mostly because the data has not been recorded nor has what is recorded been isolated from other data so as to allow analysis. It is important, too, that the successes be recorded so that they can become useful to others.

**From these findings, a priority set of goals for the school district suggest themselves:**

- Better ways of keeping track of the problems of the First Nations students is certainly needed.
- Better ways to fully engage every classroom teacher with the problem that First Nations cultural differences present must also be a priority, one that will need fresh insights and methods.

- The persisting problem of reading fluency, already a district priority, requires more than what is being done if First Nations students are to share in any successes.
- An inherent inflexibility of secondary school organizations and the resulting difficulty teachers have responding effectively to First Nations students, must be seriously addressed. Organizational inflexibility handicaps most of what secondary teachers are wont to do on behalf of students having difficulties.
- That the perceptions held by First Nations peoples are not finding their way into the curriculum day is worrying to say the least and some action must be taken to see that this is, indeed, done.

That these goals are goals meant for the school system does not exclude the need to fully involve First Nations families and communities in the development of better ways to do things. However, it is the schools and their teachers who must, in the end, accept the children as they arrive at the school door, and, more importantly, learn how to better serve them.

**FIVE MAIN GOALS ARE SUGGESTED BY THE STUDY**

- GOAL I** THE BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES MAKE THE IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOLING FOR FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS ONE OF THEIR HIGHEST PRIORITIES,  
  
AND THAT WAYS BE FOUND AT THE DISTRICT-LEVEL TO TRACK FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS, THEIR PROBLEMS AND THEIR SUCCESSES SO AS TO KEEP THE PROBLEM IN FOCUS.
- GOAL II** THE DISTRICT FIND WAYS OF HAVING EACH CLASSROOM TEACHER EXAMINE HOW CROSS-CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECT OUTCOMES FOR FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS UNDER THEIR CARE.
- GOAL III** ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FIND WAYS IN WHICH READING FLUENCY OF THE PRIMARY AND INTERMEDIATE FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS CAN BE ASSURED.
- GOAL IV** SECONDARY SCHOOLS FIND WAYS TO INTRODUCE AN ORGANIZATIONAL FLEXIBILITY THAT WILL ALLOW FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL
- GOAL V** THE DISTRICT FIND WAYS THAT WILL MORE ASSUREDLY HAVE EACH CLASSROOM TEACHER, ESPECIALLY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS, PUT FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES INTO LESSON PLANS.

**THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES ATTEMPT TO SUGGEST WAYS THESE GOALS MIGHT BE MET.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS (IN ORDER OF PRIORITY UNDER EACH GOAL)**

### **GOAL I**

**THE DISTRICT NEEDS TO FIND WAYS TO TRACK FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS, THEIR PROBLEMS AND THEIR SUCCESSES SO AS TO KEEP THE PROBLEM IN FOCUS THROUGH THE YEARS.**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Because there is a need for the district to better track and coordinate efforts to resolve First Nations student problems,**

It is recommended that a computerized, district-level registry of all First Nations students be established, and that such a registry track school moves, absenteeism, tardiness, discipline and the achievements of each student; as well as growth statistics based on data derived from tracked individuals. Such a system would require monthly updates from schools, and would be able to sort data and produce reports according to school, grade, or age cohort.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

**Because First Nations student home moves, within and without the district, are sometimes frequent and disruptive to both students and the ability of schools to provide continuity to both academic and social needs,**

It is recommended that a designated staff member assure that both the academic and social needs of the student (including living arrangements) are made known to each of the student's classroom teachers at the time of registration, and that such students are immediately registered in the proposed First Nations database.

It is also recommended that a working relationship with parents, foster parents, or people in the home community be developed at the time of registration.

### **GOAL II**

**THE DISTRICT NEEDS TO FIND WAYS OF HAVING EACH CLASSROOM TEACHER EXAMINE HOW WHAT THEY DO AFFECTS OUTCOMES FOR FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS UNDER THEIR CARE.**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Because evidence suggests that the cultural differences generated by the presence of First Nations students in our classrooms are unlikely to be solved outside of such classrooms,**

It is recommended that the district undertake an initiative that will have school-level personnel, particularly classroom teachers and the students, become involved in a re-examination of how cultural differences impact on outcomes for both First Nations students and others.

It is also recommended that First Nations parents of the children in each school be asked to join the teachers and students of that school in their pursuit of the problems associated with cultural differences.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Because there is evidence that First Nations secondary students seem to be limiting the range of their career aspirations,**

It is recommended attempts be made to try to discover the student thinking behind their career choices so as to develop programs that help them broaden their choices.

It is recommended that secondary schools, in cooperation with communities and Families through the First Nations Education Council, develop ways in which the career aspirations of First Nations students can be better understood, broadened and accommodated by the school,

It is recommended that the First Nations Education Council in cooperation with school district secondary schools, initiate and develop information that would help First Nations secondary students see that there are many more options than they maybe think are open to them. It is believed that such information should be specific and current in content, especially in regard to career opportunities available in home communities and nearby urban centres.

**Recommendation 3:**

**Because evidence shows that the present system of parent-teacher contact tends to lapse into a one-way communication about the shortcomings of the student who is having difficulty accommodating to school,**

It is recommended that the district initiate a program whereby classroom teachers of children at risk see if they can develop a more positive and persistent system of contact with such families. For instance, a system which lets them meet such parents at least once monthly, and which places more emphasis on how programs might be adjusted to accommodate the home. A system which asks parents and students to share their concerns and career aspirations and how the school may help more with less emphasis on the obligations and failures of the family and student to comply with school determined goals, and more encouragement for the families to participate in decision-making.

It is also recommended that the district, through the First Nations Education Council, encourage communities and parents to help establish a more effective school relationships with families of students at risk, a relationship that is based on a dialogue expanded to include the goals of the family and the student.

### **GOAL III**

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS NEED TO FIND WAYS IN WHICH READING FLUENCY OF THE PRIMARY AND INTERMEDIATE FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS CAN BE ASSURED.**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Because evidence (including local evidence) suggests that the Reading Recovery program used in elementary schools might not be effective for the bottom third of those referred, and because there is evidence to suggest that First Nations home experiences, including cultural biases, are unique to each child, and because research shows entry reading for children at risk must be tailored to what the child brings to school as well as what is needed to be learned,**

It is recommended that small group, shared, learning settings that are rooted in the child's experiences, be the entry strategy to reading regardless of what form directed instruction might eventually take.

It is also recommended that if monthly assessments show that Reading Recovery or any other remedial actions are not producing change for a First Nation child, that an immediate program review and revision be considered.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

**Because some First Nations students in Intermediate grades continue to have academic deficiencies, especially in reading and mathematics, And because some of these students have attended several schools and others are frequently absent or tardy,**

It is recommended that monthly parent contact be established as routine at the time of registration, and that the family and student be given an opportunity to share in decision-making and express aspirations they have regarding school before any remedial program is set.

It is also recommended that the nature of the remedial program be jointly decided by the parent, student and school with particular attention paid to the sensibilities of the student in regard to the method, maturity and cultural relevancy of content.

And it is recommended that direct reading instruction within the classroom context be part of any upgrade attempt.

### **GOAL IV**

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS NEED TO FIND WAYS TO INTRODUCE THE FLEXIBILITY THAT WILL ALLOW FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Because there is evidence that First Nations students leaving school before completing Grade 12 and others who self-select themselves into**

**easier courses, are likely deficient in the language arts upon entry into secondary school,**

It is recommended that a well-defined Power Reading for Success Unit either be prefixed to existing language arts courses for all students in the first term of each school year in Grades 8, 9 and 10 or be offered as an elective course for credit. If an elective is the choice, that parents of students become party to the decision to stream youngsters into the program.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Because evidence shows that more flexibility than is now exercised is needed to serve students at risk when academic and social needs of such student require intervention,**

It is recommended that the philosophical basis upon which remedial and discipline actions are premised be examined by teaching staffs to see if the goal of school retention and success are truly being served. For instance, do automatic consequences for late assignments, poor test performance, tardiness, skipping, and absenteeism in themselves really encourage a willing participation in school?

**Recommendation 3:**

**Because evidence suggests that many First Nations students are unable to handle homework content because they feel it is outside their ken, or that they are overloaded with homework from several courses,**

It is recommended that each secondary school examine ways to assure that all assigned homework tasks are within the ken of *most* students, and that homework is managed in ways, which do not produce overload for most students.

It is also recommended that supervised homework completion be organized within school hours for those students who persistently are unable to get homework done at home.

And in event that the homework itself is perceived to be beyond the student's understanding, that the tasks be reduced, modified or replaced by more suitable tasks for long as the best interests of the student are deemed to be served by such an accommodation.

**Recommendation 4:**

**Because those First Nations students in secondary grades who continue to have academic deficiencies, have often attended several schools, and have attendance, skipping and tardiness problems,**

It is recommended that monthly parent contact be established as a routine by classroom teachers where academic deficits exist and that the family and student be given an opportunity to share aspirations they have regarding school before any discipline or remedial actions are taken.

It is also recommended that the nature of the remedial program planned to take place outside mainstream lessons, be jointly decided by the parent, student and school with particular attention paid to the sensibilities of the student in

regard to the method, maturity and the cultural relevancy of content. It is recommended, too, that each First Nations student at risk be listed with the proposed First Nations district-level tracking system no matter what time of year they register.

**Recommendation 5:**

**Because there is evidence to suggest that support staff outside of classrooms are frequently not in a position to effectively support students having academic problems which arise out of classroom work,**

It is recommended that each secondary school examine ways in which the classroom teacher can be more reliably and more directly involved in supporting the student who is having difficulty with assigned tasks.

**And because there is some evidence to show that although First Nations support workers do have contractual definitions for their roles, there is evidence that operational definitions at the school level need clarification,**

It is also recommended that First Nations support workers be party to clarifying their roles in schools.

**Recommendation 6:**

**Because feelings of alienation reported by First Nations students do not always surface so that they can then be rectified,**

It is recommended that each secondary school examine ways in which these concerns may anonymously be communicated to administrators and teachers

It is also recommended that the existing district referral procedures under the Racism Policy be better communicated to students, especially those in the secondary system.

**GOAL V**

**THE DISTRICT NEEDS TO FIND WAYS THAT WILL MORE ASSUREDLY HAVE EACH CLASSROOM TEACHER, ESPECIALLY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS, PUT FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES INTO LESSON PLANS.**

**Recommendation 1:**

**Because the Ministry has mandated that the heritage and culture of First Nation peoples be integrated into established curricula, and because no specific local guidelines nor resource support have been directly matched with prescribed curricula to take advantage the opportunities that exist,**

**And because our local survey of First Nations secondary students, particularly in schools where there are large numbers of them, show a need by First Nations students to have the public recognition such studies bring,**

**And because both First Nations and non-First Nations students need to learn mutual respect for and accept the differences between each other,** It is recommended that the district undertake an initiative to examine curricula, especially the Social Studies curriculum, in order to produce a succinct list of issues, opportunities and resources that will assist classroom teachers to implement the Ministry mandate in such a way as to assure that that all students will accost First Nations perspectives in each school year, particularly in those schools with having First Nations students.

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*Literacy in elementary and secondary is a problem. Many self-select themselves into easier courses. Drop out is rate higher.*

**Attendance and Absenteeism: A Recent Local Example Summarized**, a local secondary school

*In one local secondary school in this school year, the absentee rate for First Nations students group 20% higher than the non-First Nations student population. First Nations and non-First Nations students failing one or more courses exhibited similar attendance behaviours in that they both exceeded the average school absentee rate by about 11%.*

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*All students who learned to read in Kindergarten were found superior in reading skills and in all other educational indicators as seniors in high school. Regrettably, the gains made by Native American students were significantly lower than other minorities: Blacks - 13.5%, Asians - 10.5%, Hispanics - 7.0% Native Americans - 3.0%*

**High School Completion Rates by Native American**, Suzanne B. Riles, Northwest Regional Educational Lab, Portland, November 1995  
*A national study in the U.S.A. showing a 29.2 drop out rate*

**Student Achievement among Native Students in British Columbia**, Ian Cameron, Canadian Journal of Native education, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1990  
*Among 36 secondary schools in B. C., those having high Native enrollment had higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and lower participation rates on Grade 12 government examinations when compared with lower Native enrollment schools.*

**Socio-Economic Indicators in Indian Reserves and Comparable Communities 1971-1991**, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1997

*Socio-economic equivalent communities were compared. Educational outcomes were all but equal in most respects except one: the dropout rate in the First Nations communities was very much greater.*

**The Learners of British Columbia (Commissioned Papers: Volume 2)**,

Ronald Marx, Tarrance Grieve, British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, Victoria, May 1988.

*At all grade levels and on all academic measures, Native students are receiving failing grades. Surprisingly though, a smaller proportion are enrolled in special education programs or are receiving learning assistance. A greater percentage, however, are enrolled in non-academic programs.*

**WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE CAUSES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS IN SCHOOL?**

**American Indians Out of School: A Review of School-Based Causes and Solutions**, Jon Reyhner, Journal of American Indian Education, May 1992

*Instead of blaming social and economic factors and the student victim, this writer turns the dropout focus to the failings of the school system: large schools, uncaring and untrained teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate curriculum, inappropriate testing/student retention, tracked classes, and lack of parent involvement.*

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*Describes a community-based, bottom up, model aimed at sensitizing schools to their cultural environment. Needs assessment surveys drove the model that concerned First Nations run schools.*

**Cultural and Parental Influences on Achievement among Native American Students in Barstow Unified School District**, Dorothy M. Leveque, California, 1994

*An analysis of mean percentile scores of norm-referenced test data showed that Native American students in Barstow scored as well as or better than the total student population in all areas except second and third-grade reading in 1992. The long established and historically driven assimilation of the Barstow families into the majority culture was seen as the deciding success factor.*

**Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues, "Aboriginal Education at the Crossroads: The Legacy of Residential Schools and the Way Ahead",** Chapter 10, Jean Barman, Harcourt Brace Canada, 1993

*The authors describe how the early acceptance of First Nations students into B. C. public schools by teachers and community school boards, was disrupted by intervention of the federal government who saw all Canadian Native peoples as being the same. They financed and set up reserve base schools that took the children from their communities and isolated them from the non-First Nations population. That this isolation from the mainstream community and the isolation of children from families has greatly affected family perceptions of schooling remains to impact on today's students.*

**Criticism of Current Assessment Measures,** Roger Bordeaux, ERIC Digest, September 1995

*Skill mastery, student portfolios and attitudinal measures are concluded to be better indicators with which to judge student progress. Standardized norm-based testing is no longer accepted as the best method for determining learner success.*

**Student's Background and its Relationship to Class and Program in School,** Board of Education, Toronto, 1970

*Occupation of the head of the household more often than not determines success at school. For instance the likelihood of a child of an engineer or lawyer completing secondary school is 89.7 percent, of a child of a labourer is 46.5 percent and of a mother on welfare is 21.4 percent.*

**A Legacy for Learners: The Report of the Royal Commission on Education, "Educational Opportunities for First Nations Children",** 8.C.4, Commissioner: Barry M. Sullivan, Victoria, 1988

*The proportion of lone-parent families, predominantly headed by females, is double that of the provincial population as a whole. They have lower participation rates in the labour force and work for lower salaries. Etc.,*

**A Legacy for Learners: The Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Summary Report, "First Nations Children",** pp. 57 - 58, Commissioner: Barry M. Sullivan, Victoria, 1988

*Recommendation 23 through 26 covering First Nations learners are described.*

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT LEARNING TO READ AND FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS?

**Report on Reading Recovery (First Nations Students),** Joan Saunders (Reading Recovery Teacher Leader), School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson), Kamloops, March 1998  
*See Appendix B.*

**Reading Recovery: An Independent Evaluation**, Timothy Shanahan, Rebecca Barr, Reading Research Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 4, October-December 1995  
*Although students make better than expected gains, the program is less effective in maintaining the gains and more costly than has been claimed. Difficulty in properly assessing because selection process placing children in the program are not consistent so research results of most studies are tainted. About 30% do not meet the average achievement criteria by the end of Grade 1.*

**INSIGHTS INTO TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION**, Dr. Lloyd Ollila, Praeger Publishers, Vancouver, 1982  
*An interview with Dr. Walter MacGinitie which summarizes research on how children learn to read. The context of comprehension instruction should always be one which the child is reading something meaningful and important and which he/she feels a need to understand. MacGinitie doesn't believe that thinking of reading comprehension as a series of skills is useful. However, an emphasis on the mechanics of reading may translate into better comprehension scores in the primary grades.*

**Reading and Language Arts Curricula in Elementary and Secondary Education for American Indians and Alaska Natives**, Gerald L. Brown, Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, Washington, D.C., 1991  
*The tradition of textbook driven learning does not take into account that dialects of English often exist in Native homes, dialects which are an integral part of the child's personal identity. The authors suggest ways to teach children with limited native proficiency in English. What he describes is a treatise on how most good teachers adjust their teaching to meet the needs of individual children.*

**Beating the Odds: Navajo Children Becoming Literate**, David Hartle-Schutte, Hawaii, 1990  
*From a very small sample of identified successful fifth grade readers, the author concludes that home conditions, low income, single parenting, alcoholism, employment, linguistic differences nor limited print in the home prevented success for the group of children studied. Extensive family involvement is seen as the determiner.*

**Supporting Emergent Literacy among Young American Indian Students**, William Ross McEachern, ERIC Digest, 1990  
*Links development of listening comprehension with emergent reading comprehension of young American Indian students. Culturally relevant materials and accommodation of possible linguistic diversity where English as a dialect might be found.*

**School Readiness and Children's Developmental Status**, Nicholas Zills et al, ERIC Digest, December 1995  
*Although existing preschool programs help emerging literacy and numeracy, they do not appear to help behaviour, speech and health difficulties. When compared*

*to low family income; low maternal education, minority language status, and family structure are better predictors of development, accomplishment and difficulties.*

## WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT SCHOOL RETENTION AND FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS?

**The Dropout**, C. D. Paravantes, School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson), Kamloops, 1990

*Local statistics in 1989-90 asked students their reasons for dropping out. They reported: Work - 65.5%, Alternate Education - 24.1% and Pregnancy - 10.3%. Those in the Storefront School reported: Teacher Problems - 23%, Lack of Interest - 4%, Poor Attitude - 6%, Poor Grades - 19%, Work - 4%, Trouble with Law - 10%, Failed Grade - 10%, Lack of Options - 6%, Personal Problems - 13%, Health - 2%, Sports - 4%. Overall, Poor School Fit accounts for 71%: a discontinuity between school goals and student goals.*

**Dropout Prevention**, Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, Washington, D.C., October 1990

*In order of frequency, students drop out because of: poor grades, school attendance, drugs & alcohol, self esteem, abuse and neglect, physical and sexual abuse, defeatist attitude, discipline problems in school, pregnancy, young parents lacking parenting skills. Students haven't failed, the systems created have failed them. We need to restructure our systems and organizations. The study noted that one third of Grade 8 students were academically unprepared for secondary.*

**An Examination of Native Education in British Columbia (Draft)**, E. R. Atleo, Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1993

*The Native student has a healthy self-image, which is contrary to prevailing opinions and views held by education observers. The context of heritage, home and society are positive, but that of the school less positive. Although 85.1% of students consider themselves capable in school, there is 33.7% discrepancy between expectations and performance. Homework completion is identified as a major culprit, especially in Grade 9 to 12. This same paper examines school readiness noting that the discrepancy between First Nations and others has all but disappeared in recent years to make almost entry equivalency.*

**Plans for Dropout Prevention and Special School Support Services for American Indian and Alaska Native Students**, Jon Reyhner, Indian Nations At Risk Task Force, Washington, D.C., 1991

*Traditional Native orientation is not a handicap in regard to school success. Schools need to provide both the closeness and culturally appropriate curriculum that Native at risk students need to succeed. There is also a need for ways to allow the bus students to participate in before and after school study and*

*activities. Block programming might be used so as to create more curricular and extra-curricular flexibility. A definition of "parent involvement" that moves out past the parent as policeman to educating parents about the function of school. Etc.,*

**Native American Youth at Risk Study**, Ardy Sixkiller Clarke, Montana State University, Montana, 1994

*Examines personal, cultural, school, and family factors contributing to the decision of an American Indian student to remain in school until graduation or dropout. Those who dropped out demonstrated significant differences in self-esteem, frequency of skipping, teacher expectations and attitudes, and grade retention. Graduates reported family expectations (particularly of mother and grandmother) kept them at school.*

**The Use of the Self-Directed Search to Identify American Indian High School Dropouts**, Eldon M. Gade et al, School Counselor, Vol. 39, No. 4, March 1992

*There was an above average dropout rate for American Indian girls who held Realistic and Social interest preferences. Boys with Enterprising codes had above average dropout rates. Girls with Investigative interests and boys with Conventional interests had the lowest dropout rates.*

**Survey of Secondary Student School Experiences**, Del Turner, First Nations Education Council: School District 73 (Kamloops/Thompson), May 1998  
*See Appendix A.*

**Dropping Out among American Indian and Alaska Natives; A review of Studies**, Kren Swisher, Michelle Hoisch, Journal of American Indian Education, Vol. 31, No. 2, January 1992

*Describes difficulties in obtaining accurate statistics because of small sample size. Emphasizes structural disadvantages rather than "cultural discontinuity" as the major influences to drop out.*

**Leadership Characteristics: A Comparison of Junior High School Students**, Peggy Roupe, Journal of American Indian Education, Vol. 26, No. 3, May 1987  
*Study indicated that leadership perceptions of both Indian and non-Indian students were similar.*

**Is Cultural Discontinuity an Adequate Explanation for Dropping Out?** Susan Ledlow, Journal of American Indian Education, Vol. 31, No. 3, May 1992

*The exclusive focus on culture and curricular innovation obscures the possibility that economics and social structure may be more important factors.*

**Career Counseling for Native Youth**, R. Vance Peavy, Canadian Guidance and Counseling Foundation, Ottawa, 1994

*Life and career path for some Native youth is often unbelievably chaotic and unpredictable, especially to transitional individuals. Psychometric approaches to*

*counseling are inappropriate. Characteristic of a good counselor for Native youth are: best-friend who knows when to speak, personal but non-invasive, trustworthy, accessible on drop-in basis, involved in Native presence in school, known to the community and know family members by name, patient, accepting and humorous. The counselor need not be a Native, but must have an unbiased knowledge of Native culture. Etc.,*

**Using Simulations to Enhance Career Education,** ERIC Digest, Kathleen Cairns, 1995

*An emphasis on computer-managed, information based programs career programs provides little in the way a realistic examination of what career choices might bring to a student. In recent years, experiential career programs like work experience, job shadowing and co-op education have also been introduced, but they are often complex and difficult to arrange and manage. Carefully designed career simulations can be very effective additions to any program to serve as a link between information and the workplace.*

**Middle Years Reading Instruction: Suggested Principles,** Victor Froese, The Reading Teacher, 1981

*Meaning comes from an interaction of experience, language competence, and visual or auditory information. Reading instruction in the middle grades requires a shift in instructional technique with less emphasis on code and more on comprehension. The principles in the article also apply to those middle school students requiring remedial instruction.*

**School Dropouts: New Information About an Old Problem,** Wendy Swartz, ERIC Digest, August 1995.

*Nearly two thirds leave before Grade 10. They comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare and a similar percentage of the prison population. More than half moved during the four-year study period. Nearly a quarter change schools two or more times. One fifth were held back a grade. Half missed at least 10 days of school. One third cut class at least 10 times. One third got school suspensions or were put on probation. Dropouts tended to believe they don't have control over their lives. Most frequently reported intervention by schools was to try to talk a student into staying, but even this effort happened only 39% of the time.*

**Blueprints for Indian Education: Improving Mainstream Schooling,** Robin A. Butterfield, ERIC Digest, June 1994

*Describes the steps needed to assure successful accommodation of First Nations students into mainstream schooling. A shift in ways teachers support students, proactive accommodation of differing support methods, and infusion of cross-cultural programming, shift of teaching styles, improved assessment methods, etc.,*

**Schools as Communities**, ERIC Digest, Mark A. Royal, Robert J. Rossi, 1997  
*The quality of relationships in schools has been found to link to academic success and school retention. A strong sense of community has benefits for both staff and students. A sense of community is characterized by: shared values, common activities, ethos of caring, collegial interactions and teacher roles that extend outside of classroom duties. Six attributes: respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment and commitment. Results are less misbehaviour (class cutting, reduced absenteeism), more academic interest, greater achievement gains, and reduced number of dropouts. The key finding is that "at-risk students are provided with a community of support".*

*A favourable school structure should not be relied upon to produce a strong sense of community. Alternatively, adopting such changes can be quite disruptive and must be rooted securely in the commitment of teachers.*

**Assessing Students' and Teacher Sense of the School as a Caring Community**, William Roberts et al, 1995

*Found that schools where teacher felt a strong sense of community were not necessarily ones where students felt the same: teacher and student perceptions differed.*

**Family Role in Career Development**, Bettina A. Lankard, ERIC Digest, 1995  
*The socioeconomic factor and educational experience of parents is the strongest determiner of outcomes. However, family processes in relation to life roles can be a strong determiner, too. Structuring or guiding parent involvement in adolescent career development is seen as an important element of school career counseling. It is recommended that counselors work directly with parents, collaborating with them and helping them improve their effectiveness in guiding their children. intervention should take place as early as Grade 6.*

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHING METHODS AND THE SUCCESS FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS?

**Ways of Learning, Learning Styles and First Nations Students: A Teacher Resource**, Arthur J. More, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1998

*The author argues that Native learners learn better if learning styles thought to result from Native family, cultural traditions and life ways are taken into account. The study offers no concrete data supporting the cultural-style link, no thesis showing cultural traits can be generalized over several nations, nor any evidence that learning improves when the thesis is applied.*

\*see also **Hispanic-American Students and Learning Style**, ERIC Digest, Shierly Griggs and Rita Dunn, ERIC, May, 1996. **A Critical Review of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory**, Thomas Ruble et al, ERIC ED377221, 1994 and

***Learning Style Research: A Critical Review of the Literature***, Cesarina Thompson and Eileen Crutchlow, ERIC EJ458722, 1993

**The Relationship Between Academic Achievement and Teacher Expectations of Native Children in a Northern Manitoba Community School**, W. Rampaul, M. Sigh, J. Diddy, Selected Papers from the Mokakit Conference, Vancouver, 1986

*The well established direct relationship between teacher expectations and academic outcomes is applied and confirmed as applicable to the First Nations group under study.*

**Indian Students' Academic Self-Concept and Their Perceptions of Teacher and Parent Aspirations for Them in a Band Controlled and a Provincial School**, Cheryl Senior Wall, Paul R. Madak, Canadian Journal of Native education, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1991

*Students in a Lil'wat Nation tribal school perceived that parents and their favorite teacher held educational aspirations for them significantly higher than those perceived by public school students. These student perceptions were not tied to outcomes*

**Multicultural and Racism Awareness Programs for Teachers: A Meta-Analysis of the Research**, Josette McGregor and Charles Underleider, University of British Columbia, 1993

*An analysis of cross-cultural and the racist sensitivity methods showed that ways of changing the racial prejudice of teachers has yet to be devised. When participants were all from the majority culture, the outcomes were more certain. Overall, despite the best intentions, 30% of the effect sizes were negative. The researchers concluded that better preparation is need by those who design and deliver such sessions, with a need to better understand how attitude and behaviour changes take place.*

**Classroom Practices That Enhance Student's Sense of Community**, Dong-Il Kim et al, American Educational Research Association, 1995

*The study investigates "sense of community" as the integrating factor which promotes attachment to school norms and values. The strong link between classroom practice and sense of community show that these practices do so: emphasis on pro-social values, elicitation of student thinking and expression of ideas, encouragement of cooperation, warmth and supportiveness, and reduced use of extrinsic control. Resulting student behaviours were engagement, influence and positive behaviour.*

## WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CURRICULUM CONTENT AND FIRST NATIONS STUDENT ACCEPTANCE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL GOALS?

### **British Columbia Schools and Society (Commission Papers: Volume 1),**

John Calam, Thomas Fleming, British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, Victoria, May 1988

*Cultural identity suffers when content is missing from classroom: both native and non-native students need to acquire respect for native heritage.*

### **Curriculum in the Schools of British Columbia (Commissioned Papers: Volume 3),**

David F. Robitaille, Antoinette A. Oberg, Valeria J. Overgaard, J. Terrence McBurney, British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, Victoria, May 1988

*All curricular materials should include material dealing with the unique character of Native society, and make clear the past and continuing contributions of Native Indians to Canadian society.*

### **Culturally Responsive Curriculum,** Ismat Abdal-Haqq, ERIC Digest, June 1994

*Discusses opposing views: retaining heritage and improving intercultural harmony vs. divisive because it fragments development of a common culture (an American issue). When adopted, however, the article warns against "side bar" applications as in textbook layouts.*

### **Teaching with a Multicultural Perspective,** ERIC Digest, Rey A, Gomez, 1991

*The early childhood teacher is the key to successful multicultural education. The culture, opinions and attitudes of caregivers during pre-school and early school experiences greatly affect child's perceptions: children easily develop stereotypes during these early years. There need not be a separate, unified set of goals and curriculum to have effective multicultural education, however, attaching positive feelings to multicultural experiences must be an outcome.*

### **Grade 8 - 10 Social Studies,** "Society and Culture", Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Victoria, 1998

*Describes prescribed learning outcomes for society and culture units as part of the 8 - 10 curriculum*

### **The Social Studies 11 Curriculum,** Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Victoria, 1998

*Describes the Grade 11 social studies curriculum, a required course for graduation.*

### **B.C. First Nations Studies 12,** Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Victoria, 1998

*Describes an elective Grade 12 course covering First Nations history, culture and issues.*

**Integrating BC First Nations Studies: A K-10 Guide for Teachers**  
**Response Draft 1996**, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Victoria, 1996  
*Proposed curriculum topics intended to be integrated into other classroom studies. Comprehensive in scope and detailed in content.*

**Survey of Secondary Student School Experiences,**  
 Del Turner, First Nations Education Council: School District 73  
 (Kamloops/Thompson), May 1998

**The purpose of the survey was to sample First Nations secondary student experiences to get an idea what connections there might be between research data and local schooling.** The survey was controlled only so far that students who took part completed the survey form while under supervision in the school setting so as to assure that only the individual student contributed to the response on the form. No selection of students took place, with those who were available taking part. Grade 8 to 12 students were surveyed. A copy of the form is attached.

***Although only about one third of all First Nations students in the district took part, their replies suggest that young people know what the problems are, and should become active partners in any attempt to change things for the better.***

HIGHLIGHTS OF ANECDOTAL FORM RESPONSES:

**ASPIRATIONS OF STUDENTS**

Practically all students (96%) stated they intended to complete Grade 12. When it came to aspirations after Grade 12, girls more often than boys aspire to careers that require post-secondary education:

	University	College	Job	Not Known
Girls	17%	46%	27%	8%
Boys	9%	42%	40%	9%

Although hard to gage because only First Nations students took part, the range of career choices seemed limited, to maybe be driven by a perception that many career choices are not open to First Nations students. Further study might be valuable.

**PROBLEM-SOLVING**

The frank and sincere responses about ways they go about solving problems suggests that there is considerable potential for having First Nations secondary students enter into a partnership with teachers and parents to improve schooling. The responses revealed much about the difficulties they face, and the courageous ways they go about solving problems.

When asked what they themselves did to resolve school difficulties, most ( 40%) either took on the job themselves, while others sought help from adults in their

lives (32%). Some ignored their problems (11%), and a few either didn't reply or stated they didn't have any problems (18%).

Asked if adults at school had helped them with difficulties over their school years, sixty-seven percent told of teachers, counselors, First Nations support workers and administrators who had helped them. Twenty-six percent stated either that adults at school hadn't helped them, or they had had no need of adult help. Seven percent didn't reply.

### **PROBLEMS THIS YEAR**

These responses suggest that First Nations secondary students, regardless of talent, are having a lot of trouble keeping up with assignments. They talk of stress and frustration and an overload of homework. English and mathematics are bugbears for those who are getting mediocre or poor marks. Many told of absenteeism and skipping which had led to academic problems, while others suggested that their absenteeism was often an avoidance of the overwhelming workload.

When it comes to social problems, most reported that they had few if any problems with other students. Many complained of difficult relations with this teacher or that one, which they often admitted they had authored themselves. There were also complaints about a few teachers who denigrate students. Out of 253 responses, three specific cases of racism were cited.

### **IF THEY WERE IN CHARGE**

Many responses were tongue in cheek suggesting everything from refreshments on tap to coed showers, to no school at all. However, some took the question seriously with most quite certain that school should start later in the morning. The serious ones wrote about course relevancy (an old saw of secondary students), but there were also suggestions about the need for better lesson presentation. They told of lecture lessons with little or no opportunity for them to participate, while others spoke of a need for courses that let students move at their own pace.

**APPENDIX B:**

**First Nations Reading Recovery Report**

**(Not available at this time)**

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**Del Turner,  
Researcher**