

Improving Indigenous Education in Ontario

Submitted by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce

Co-sponsored by the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce,
Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, and the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce

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Issue:

Workforce shortages are among the most significant challenges for Ontario businesses, and it is widely recognized that Canada's Indigenous people – the fastest-growing population in the country – must be a key component of Ontario's strategy. While educational attainment for Indigenous people has been on the rise, more must be done to ensure that all Ontarians have the education and training needed to succeed in a modern economy.

Background:

More must be done to close attainment gaps in Indigenous education: almost half of the Indigenous population of working age has some form of post-secondary qualification¹, as compared to the two-thirds of the non-Indigenous population of the same age.² Additionally, 10 percent of the working-age Indigenous population has a university degree, as compared to the non-Indigenous population's 26 percent.³

Bridging this gap would have a considerable economic impact: if the education and labour market outcomes of Indigenous Canadians reached the level of the general population by 2026, government spending would drop by \$14.2 billion, while increasing Indigenous income by \$36.5 billion.⁴

As the provincial government is responsible for education of the Indigenous population living off reserve, Ontario's efforts to address these responsibilities falls within the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. It allows for enhanced investment in and collaboration between the various components of the provincial education system serving Indigenous students. It also places much-needed emphasis on the unique learning styles and cultural perspectives of aboriginal students in provincial curricula, assessment practices, and professional teacher development.

Another key element is the presence of nine Aboriginal Institutes (AIs) in Ontario, which represent vital stakeholders. These organizations deliver accredited post-secondary programs in partnership with colleges and universities through unique, culturally-sensitive delivery models that blend face-to-face learning with online courses and independent study.

Despite their key role, they remain outside the Ontario post-secondary system. Unlike provincially accredited colleges, they do not receive government capital or operational funding, instead receiving only funding for program delivery. The 2015 Ontario budget temporarily sought to address this issue, with a three-year funding envelope and a commitment to develop a policy that permanently brings the AIs into the post-secondary system. Following through on this commitment is crucial, as it will bolster AI's long-term sustainability.

¹ Statistics Canada, "Educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada", National Household Survey 2011

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, "Creating opportunities in education for Aboriginal students," 2013

Further support must also be provided through better access to data. While national census data provides some perspective, there remains a significant lack of information about whether Indigenous post-secondary education and training needs are being met in Ontario. Among other areas, there is insufficient data on issues such as enrolment, graduation rates, and program effectiveness – information which is required to establish baselines and measure progress on the academic achievement of Indigenous learners.⁵

Recommendations:

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Strengthen implementation of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework by identifying and earmarking the financial resources necessary to ensure consistent funding of Framework priorities.
2. Develop Indigenous learner reporting mechanisms at both the system and institutional levels to allow for collection of the type of reliable data needed to set baselines and measure progress on academic achievement.
3. Follow through on commitments for working with Aboriginal Institutes to develop a policy to sustainably deliver operational funding and incorporate them into the provincial post-secondary system.

⁵ Council of Ministers of Education Canada, “Key Policies in Aboriginal Education: an Evidence-Based Approach”, 2013 http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/295/Key-Policy-Issues-in-Aboriginal-Education_EN.pdf