The Conference Board of Canada
Insights You Can Count On

Lessons Learned: Achieving Positive Educational Outcomes in Northern Communities

Centre
for
the North

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

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Lessons Learned: Achieving Positive Educational Outcomes in Northern Communities
by *Ashley Sisco, Margaret Caron-Vuotari, Carole Stonebridge, Greg Sutherland,* and *Gilles Rhéaume*

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Preface

Education is a strong determinant of opportunity and prosperity, and contributes to individual and community well-being. Education is an area in which Canada excels in many ways, but this success is uneven. Northerners lag behind their Southern counterparts in terms of educational attainment. But, at the same time, cutting-edge educational practices and models are emerging in some parts of the North.

This report examines education in the context of Northern communities. Its primary objective is to explore Northern experiences and share lessons learned and practices and models that Northerners believe are having a positive impact on educational outcomes. By sharing examples of Northern educational practices and models that could be adopted more broadly throughout the North, the report offers insights and ideas on ways to tackle the challenges identified.

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Acknowledgements

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR THE NORTH

The Centre for the North is a major research initiative of The Conference Board of Canada. The Centre brings Aboriginal leaders, businesses, governments, and community advocates together to identify challenges and opportunities, and to decide how those challenges can be met. Working with Northern stakeholders and some 50 roundtable members, the Centre delivers cutting-edge research and provides a vibrant forum for discussion on issues facing Canada's North.

Vision: Toward a shared vision of sustainable prosperity in Canada's North.
Mission: Through research and dialogue, develop new insights that strengthen the foundation for informed decision-making.

The Centre examines issues from a Northern perspective, seeks to maximize Northern engagement, and prioritizes Northern interests. The Centre looks at issues and opportunities across the North—a vast region that includes the three Northern territories, as well as the northern portions of seven provinces.

To date, the Centre has published a number of foundational and issue-specific reports related to the underlying themes of thriving communities, economic development, and security and sovereignty. The Centre's research agenda is based on a strategic interdisciplinary framework, as illustrated in the exhibit "Sustainable Prosperity."

Sustainable Prosperity

Cross-Cutting Themes:
- ⬆ Governance and Policy-Making ⬆
- ⬆ Transportation and Infrastructure ⬆
- ⬆ Human Capital ⬆
- ⬆ Healthy Populations ⬆
- ⬆ Environmental Sustainability ⬆

Foundational Themes: Thriving Communities | Mapping Economic Potential | Security and Sovereignty
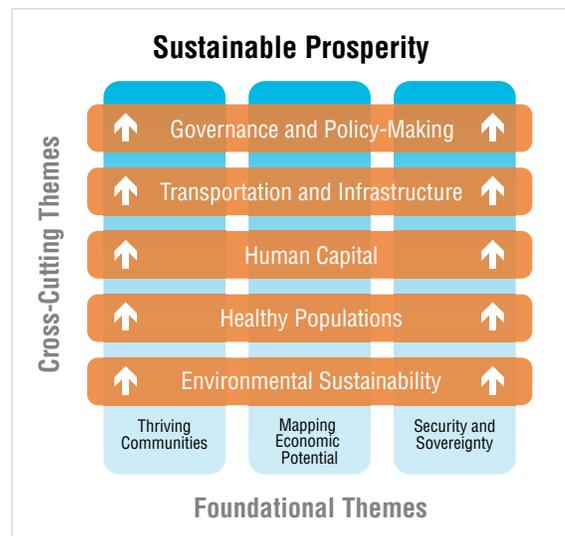
CENTRE FOR THE NORTH MEMBERS

The Conference Board of Canada is grateful to the investors and roundtable members of the Centre for the North that, through their membership, support the Centre's research program.

(Note: The findings and conclusions of this report are entirely those of The Conference Board of Canada, not of the Centre investors and roundtable members.)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lessons Learned: Achieving Positive Educational Outcomes in Northern Communities

At a Glance

- Northerners lag behind their Southern counterparts in terms of educational attainment. Northern communities with higher levels of education tend to have more positive socio-economic conditions.

- New trends in educational programming and delivery have the potential to improve educational outcomes.

- By sharing examples of Northern educational practices and models that could be adopted more broadly throughout the North, this report offers insights and ideas on ways to tackle the challenges identified.

Education is a strong determinant of individual and community prosperity and well-being around the world. While Canada is regarded as a world leader in educational outcomes, this appears to be true for only part of the country. Northerners lag behind their Southern counterparts in terms of high school, post-secondary, and—especially—university attainment. At the same time, cutting-edge educational practices and models are emerging in some parts of the North and Northern communities that could drive an improvement in these outcomes.

Which unique educational challenges and opportunities exist in the North? And, how can educational outcomes become understood in the context of these challenges and opportunities? This report employed a mix of research methods to examine these questions and explore Northern experiences, practices, and models believed to have a positive impact on educational outcomes.

Socio-economic factors play a significant role in supporting positive educational outcomes. Without access to the jobs and incomes that provide incentives to learn, homes that include adequate study space, and communities that are generally secure, many Northerners may be neither motivated nor equipped to perform well in school. The research conducted for this report suggests that Northern communities with higher levels of education tend to have more positive socio-economic conditions. Several factors stand out as having the most significant impact:

- Educational outcomes tend to decrease as the *Aboriginal population* increases. This result may be explained by the prevalence of social and access-related challenges in the Aboriginal population, as well as challenges related to unique cultural needs. Interviews with Northerners corroborate and nuance these findings.
- *Crowded housing, single-parent families, and crime* emerged as the most important social factors in the statistical analysis conducted for this report.

◆ *Employment in a community* proved to be an important factor that encourages educational attainment. The prospect of good jobs encourages education, and a more educated labour force attracts additional and better jobs.

◆ *Income-related factors* proved important to tertiary attainment. Households with higher incomes are more likely to have adults with more education. This provides positive role models and also greater ability to finance the cost of education for the household's children.

Furthermore, positive educational outcomes are influenced by learner readiness, learner support, educational access, and educational awareness and responsiveness. *Learner readiness* comprises psychological wellness and preparedness to learn (mindset and attitude). It also includes socio-economic wellness and safe and secure learning environments—such as food security, adequate housing needs (basic needs), and freedom from violence. *Learner support* includes community and family support—which could be felt through encouragement, academic interest and assistance with homework, or the provision of resources. *Educational access* includes access to learning opportunities through educational institutions and resources, such as schools, libraries, museums, and teachers. This also includes access to culturally appropriate curriculum and educational delivery, as well as education that meets language needs—all of which are particularly important in Northern Aboriginal communities. And *educational awareness and responsiveness* includes ongoing assessments and revisions to educational programming to ensure that educational programming and delivery are effective.

Our research shows that Northerners are generally not at parity with the South in terms of learner readiness, learner support, educational access, or awareness and responsiveness—which may explain the generally lower educational outcomes in the North.

While the North may often lag behind the South in terms of educational outcomes, it appears to be leading new trends in educational programming and delivery. This is evidenced by the adoption of learner-centred approaches, such as the broad-based uptake of e-learning. It is also

evidenced, in some settings, in curriculum that reflects local cultural interests, values informal learning, and integrates these into assessments of student outcomes alongside traditional measures of academic success. It is seen in the expanded role that some schools are assuming within their home communities. Last, it is seen in the development of partnerships that connect Northern schools with educational resources and teachers in the South. These trends, and others, have the potential to improve educational outcomes in the North and South.

While the North may often lag behind the South in terms of educational outcomes, it appears to be leading new trends in educational programming and delivery.

The findings of the report suggest five specific policy-oriented recommendations to support positive educational outcomes in the North. These include:

1. **An integrated approach.** Psychological well-being is related to socio-economic well-being and safety; preparedness to learn is related to community and family support; and ongoing assessments of educational programming and delivery are related to access to education that is responsive to community and cultural needs. This type of integrated approach to education requires directing policy development to, for example, improving housing conditions, providing support for single-parent families, and preventing crime. Educators need to continue to provide mentoring and positive role models for students and encourage parents to be engaged and involved in their children's learning. And schools need to be supported as they continue to grow into their hybrid role as community hubs—providing a safe and positive learning environment along with resources and support that include nutritious meals, social programming such as daycare, and assistance with homework.

2. **Continued educational support for Northern Aboriginal communities.** Supporting and enhancing the educational attainment and success of Aboriginal youth is crucial. Support must include specific programs and policies that address the unique cultural and language needs of Aboriginal youth, and opportunities that encourage collective healing from the various impacts of the colonial legacy. Engaging Aboriginal youth also

requires continued investment in innovative delivery models that are learner-centred and provide flexibility and respect for cultural inclusivity. The challenge is to ensure that successful models are shared and, when appropriate, implemented more broadly.

3. **Accessible pathways to post-secondary education.** Northern youth need to be exposed to educational options from an early age. This requires the design and delivery of programs that make the strong link between educational outcomes and economic success. Continued support for career preparation programs, pre-training and up-skilling educational programs, adult learning centres, and gap transition programs is also needed. This will encourage students, old and young, to consider their educational options, including college or trade school programs. Educational institutions and governing bodies also need to improve their communication and coordination to support the positive transition of students between secondary and tertiary education programs. Finally, increased funding is required to support pathways to post-secondary studies in communities where low income is a demonstrated barrier to accessing higher education.

4. **A stronger pool of experienced, local, education professionals.** The development of strong and innovative recruitment and retention strategies is required to attract Aboriginal teachers and non-Aboriginal educators who have extensive experience teaching in a Northern context. Greater incentives, such as signing bonuses, moving allowances, professional development funds, and assistance with student loan payments, may help to increase the recruitment and retention of these educational professionals in the North.

5. **Continued access to schools and innovative educational programming.** This requires ongoing efforts to improve infrastructure in Northern communities. It includes programs to support broadband infrastructure, upgrade and maintain equipment, and provide technical assistance. Policies and funding are also required to nurture partnerships that connect Northern schools with educational institutions and resources in the South and to expand these partnerships to include the private sector. Such partnerships are proving effective in increasing access to education in the North.

Introduction

Chapter Summary

- Educational outcomes in Canada's North are uneven.

- This report uses a mix of research methods to examine education in the context of Northern communities in Canada.

- The report offers insights and ideas on ways to tackle the challenges identified.

Evidence suggests that educational outcomes and labour market success are directly connected to the early educational experiences of youth. Nationally, it is vital to offer equal life chances to children regardless of the location in Canada.

—Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Pathways to Success*

The Centre for the North's (CFN) foundational report *Toward Thriving Northern Communities* found that the state of educational outcomes in Canada's North is uneven—many communities are not on par with the South, while some Northern communities are faring quite well.[1] Our report, *Lessons Learned*, examines education in the context of Northern communities, with the primary objective of exploring Northern experiences and sharing lessons learned, practices, and models that Northerners believe are having a positive impact on educational outcomes. Specifically, our report aims to:

- understand the factors that correlate with positive educational outcomes in the North;
- feature educational models and practices in the North from which other Northern communities and educational institutions can learn; and
- share insights on how educational outcomes in the North can be improved.

Our report focuses on elementary to post-secondary education,[2] with a particular emphasis on the factors that contribute to the disparity in educational outcomes between North and South and among Northern communities. It considers how educational success should

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1   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*.

2   A complementary CFN publication, *Building Labour Force Capacity in Canada's North* (see Martin, Heidi), addresses adult learning and skills development.

be measured in a Northern context and explores lessons from educational models that are enhancing educational outcomes in the North. Finally, the report considers how Northern educational outcomes could be improved.

As such, the report highlights a number of critical factors involved in positive learning. By sharing examples of Northern educational practices and models that could be adopted more broadly throughout the North, the report offers insights and ideas on ways to tackle the challenges identified.

METHODOLOGY

Several research methods were employed for this report, including a literature review, interviews, and data analysis. We reviewed the available literature to understand the factors that are important to positive educational outcomes, focusing on the Northern regions

as defined by the Centre for the North's boundaries. Interviews were then conducted with educators, administrators, and government officials, representing all of the Centre's Northern regions.[3] Programs that were viewed as positive models or were achieving successful outcomes were selected for follow-up interviews.

In addition to this qualitative research, data from the 2006 Census was used to determine educational attainment for the adult population, focusing on those whose highest level of schooling was either high school, post-secondary, or university. We calculated correlation coefficients between educational attainment and other data from the census considered relevant to positive educational outcomes. The degree of dependence between the variables and three levels of educational attainment was tested.

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3   Regions included Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Northern British Columbia, Northern Alberta, Northern Saskatchewan, Northern Manitoba, Northern Ontario, Northern Quebec, and Northern Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHAPTER 2

An Overview of Educational Outcomes in the North

Chapter Summary

- ◆ Education is a strong determinant of individual and community prosperity and well-being.

- ◆ Northern Canada lags Southern Canada on key measures of educational attainment.

- ◆ Educational attainment varies widely among Northern communities and, especially, Aboriginal populations.

Education is a strong determinant of opportunity and prosperity, and contributes to individual and community well-being. In Canada, education is associated with positive labour market outcomes, such as higher employment rates and incomes; positive social outcomes, such as economic growth and knowledge spillovers; and "non-market external benefits, such as reduced criminal activity and improved health."[1]

Given the importance of education, governments in Canada have a clear interest in ensuring a robust educational system that delivers the best outcomes possible. In 2008, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) issued its joint declaration, *Learn Canada 2020*. This presents a framework of education and learning that the "provincial and territorial ministers of education,

through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, will use to enhance Canada's education systems, learning opportunities, and overall education outcomes."[2] The framework is based on a vision of lifelong learning, and includes four core pillars[3]:

1. **Early Childhood Learning and Development.** All children should have access to high-quality early childhood education that ensures they arrive at school ready to learn.
2. **Elementary to High School Systems.** All children in our elementary to high school systems deserve teaching and learning opportunities that are inclusive and that provide them with world-class skills in literacy, numeracy, and science.
3. **Post-Secondary Education.** Canada must increase the number of students pursuing post-secondary education by increasing the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education.
4. **Adult Learning and Skills Development.** Canada must develop an accessible, diversified, and integrated system of adult learning and skills development that delivers training when Canadians need it.

These pillars represent a continuum of lifelong learning, where transitions in learning occur between key points of the continuum. Individuals travel along this continuum in many varied ways. For example, some people follow

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1   Sharpe and Arsenault, *Investing in Aboriginal Education*, iii.

2   Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Learn Canada 2020*.

3   Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Learn Canada 2020*.

a linear path from school to university and then employment, while others pursue different routes, such as returning to post-secondary studies following time spent in the labour market.[4]

While many of the insights garnered in this report derive from experiences at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, the importance of each pillar—and the interconnections between them—are critical to understanding educational success overall. For example, the critical role of early childhood learning and development has become increasingly clear through work such as *The Early Years Studies*, published by the Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation (MWMFF).[5] And at the other end of the spectrum, when adults have the opportunity to upgrade their skills or education, their experiences carry forward and can shape how they instill the value and importance of learning and development with their own children.

Education is an area where Canada excels in many ways, but this success is uneven. As illustrated below, educational attainment in Northern Canada in 2006 was not on par with the rest of the country. (See Table 1.) Furthermore, attainment varied widely among Northern communities.

4   Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *A Framework for Statistics*, 10.

5   Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation, *Early Years Study 3 Launched*.

VARIANCE IN NORTHERN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

It is increasingly clear that the whole of the North cannot be painted with the same brush. In fact, a closer examination of any one issue reveals several Norths; communities in Canada's North are diverse, ". . . ranging from small, remote Aboriginal communities, to mid-sized single-industry boomtowns, to larger urban government service communities, and any combination thereof."[6] And the educational infrastructure and resources available in each Northern community, province, and territory are equally diverse. In particular, the challenges for K-12 and post-secondary education are highly variable. Secondary and post-secondary attainment rates are an important indicator of positive educational outcomes within communities. However, while high school and post-secondary attainment rates vary greatly, university attainment rates vary, to a lesser degree, across Northern communities. The CMEC's interest in ensuring young Canadians are successful in all areas of learning, including high school and post-secondary pursuits, is echoed in various provincial and territorial initiatives. The Arctic Social Indicators project is an example of an effort to determine which educational indicators are most relevant to measure in Arctic communities.

6   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 4.

Table 1
Completion of Education in Canada, 2006
(per cent)

Level of Education Attained	Northern Canada	Southern Canada	Canada
High school*	77.7	85.0	84.6
Post-secondary school (college, university, or vocational)	53.9	61.1	60.6
University**	16.2	28.7	27.9

*Assuming all those with a college, university, or vocational degree completed high school.
**A subset of "attained post-secondary." Based on income data, it has been argued that university completion is the most relevant indicator of Canada's ability to produce highly talented, innovative people. However, newer findings suggest that distinguishing between college and university is less important than the relevance of study to the workplace. See www.conferenceboard.ca/HCP/Details/education/university-completion.aspx.
Note: Figures based on the highest level of schooling of the population aged 25 to 64 years.
Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

Educational Well-Being in Arctic Communities

The goal of the Arctic Social Indicators project is to develop social indicators relevant to Arctic communities that can be used to track human development. Education is one of six domains. The project team developed an extensive list of potential indicators to measure educational well-being in Arctic communities, including inputs and outputs. Three indicators are deemed particularly relevant:

1. The proportion of students pursuing post-secondary education opportunities.
2. The ratio of students successfully completing post-secondary education.
3. The proportion of graduates who are still in the community 10 years later.

The project authors suggest that "formal education at the post-secondary level was the single most salient and comprehensive venue for documenting the cumulative effect of all forms of education on individual and community well-being. (Thus) a high post-secondary participation and completion rate implies a strong foundation of K-12 educational preparation."[1] Furthermore, the authors hold that it is important to track graduates who remain in the community as it serves as a gauge of the contribution of education to community well-being. It indicates a link between local needs and jobs and the educational opportunities provided.

1   Nordic Council of Ministers, *Arctic Social Indicators*, 82.

Source: Nordic Council of Ministers, *Arctic Social Indicators*.

As Exhibit 1 (see page 6) demonstrates, the proportion of those who drop out of high school prior to graduating is generally higher in the North. For example, based on 2006 Census data, 46 per cent of 25–64 year-olds in Nunavut did not have a high school certificate (or higher level of attainment), while the figure for Southern British Columbia is 12 per cent.[7] However, the North–South disparity is only part of the story; these rates vary greatly within the North. Yukon has a low percentage of high school incompletion even relative to the South. With only 15 per cent of 25–64 year-olds lacking a high school graduation certificate or higher level of education, Yukon is outperformed only slightly by Southern British Columbia, Southern Ontario, and Southern Alberta (12, 13, and 14 per cent, respectively).[8] In Quebec, the disparity

between North and South in terms of high school incompletion rates was very slight at 17 and 21 per cent, respectively. Newfoundland and Labrador's Northern region was actually faring better than its Southern counterpart in this regard (25 compared with 26 per cent, respectively).[9]

There are only a handful of communities in each region where the educational attainment of the adult population exceeds the national average.

Similarly, while the North has proportionately far fewer university graduates, outcomes still vary. Indeed, more than 20 per cent of communities in Yukon have university attainment levels that exceed the national average of 27.9 per cent.[10] All other areas of the North, however, are not so lucky. Aside from Yukon, fewer than 10 per cent of Northern communities in all provinces/territories have university attainment levels that exceed the national average. In fact, there are only a handful of communities in each region where the educational attainment of the adult population exceeds the national average, including Whitehorse, Yukon; Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; Lac la Biche, Alberta; Queen Charlotte, British Columbia; Grand Rapids, Manitoba; and L'Anse-au-Clair, Newfoundland and Labrador.[11]

The education disparity between North and South and among Northern communities begs several questions: What are the factors that contribute to the generally poorer educational outcomes in Canada's North? What are the factors that differentiate those communities that meet and exceed national attainment rates from those that lag behind? And what are the factors that are most important to positive educational outcomes? Current research provides some insights into what we know about this disparity. Two areas, in particular, emerge from the literature as important elements to examine: socio-economic factors, and Aboriginal educational outcomes.

7   Wilson, "High School Confidential."

8   Wilson, "High School Confidential."

9   Wilson, "High School Confidential."

10   Based on Statistics Canada 2006 Census data.

11   Based on Statistics Canada 2006 Census data.

Exhibit 1
Proportion of 24–64 Year-Olds Without a High School Diploma by Census Division in Canada

Legend: 25–64-year-olds without a high school graduation certificate or higher

- < one in three
- one in three to one in two
- > one in two
- North–South boundary
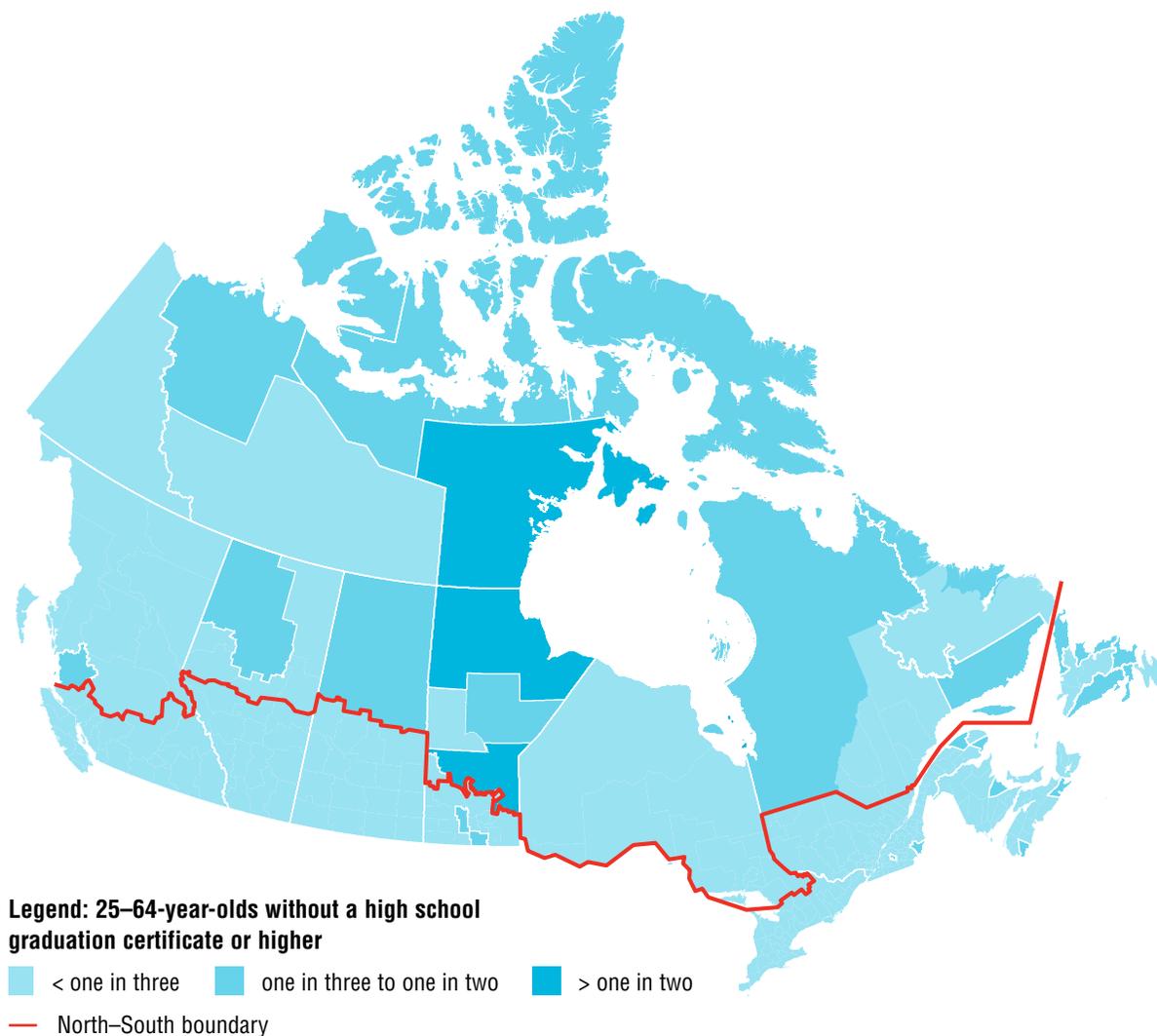
Sources: Wilson; The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Socio-economic issues play a significant role in supporting positive educational outcomes. According to a 2010 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report,

> [o]f all the factors that were found to be associated with [educational] achievement, an individual's socio-economic status had the most pronounced

association, which is indicative of an intergenerational transmission of advantage (and, conversely, intergenerational transmission of disadvantage).[12]

A 2010 Ministry of Saskatchewan Education report estimates that "family and community factors" account for about one-third of student performance in the North.[13]

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12 OECD, *Pathways to Success*, 47.

13 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Provincial Panel on Student Achievement*, 16.

This is disconcerting considering "[t]he North consistently lags behind the South across objective and measurable indicators for quality of life and community well-being."[14] The report stresses that children and youth who live with poverty in their family and community ". . . start school with at least one strike against them."[15] It also notes that these factors can affect learning in other ways, such as ". . . health problems, hunger, frequent moves, and absences from school."[16] According to the report, additional family and community factors that influence achievement include the ". . . quality of parenting a child receives, significant relationships with caring adults, family and community expectations for the student, positive community activities, adequate housing, and safe communities."[17]

A number of these socio-economic issues are prominent in Northern communities—such as low income, job shortages, overcrowded and substandard housing, and crime.[18] In 2006, the North comprised the five census divisions with the lowest incomes—three in Northern Manitoba, one in Northern Saskatchewan, and one in Northern British Columbia.[19] It also had a pre-recession unemployment rate up to five times higher than the national average of 5.3 per cent in some census divisions.[20] That same year, 25, 20, and 18 per cent of homes in Nunavut, Northern Manitoba, and Northern Saskatchewan, respectively, were crowded (six or more residents) and "the percentage of residences in need of major repairs [was] higher in every Northern region than in the South."[21] Moreover, while both property and violent crime were more prominent in the North,

the capacity to respond to crime was limited due to shortages of RCMP officers, especially in the Far North.[22] Without access to jobs and associated incomes that provide incentives to learn, homes that include adequate study space, and communities that are generally secure, many Northerners may be ill equipped to perform well in school. Poor health conditions and food security issues in some Northern communities are also placing students at a disadvantage in terms of their educational performance.

A number of socio-economic issues are prominent in Northern communities—such as low income, job shortages, overcrowded and substandard housing, and crime.

Cutting-edge practices and programs, which address these barriers, are emerging in the North, helping students to build pathways to positive educational outcomes and economic success. This requires skills and labour market relevant curriculum to support employment options such as entry-level jobs, trades, and management opportunities. As well, educators need to ensure they are designing culturally appropriate programs that enable Northern students to see themselves in the curriculum and the North as a vital part of Canada.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN NORTHERN ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS

The socio-economic gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada is well documented. The colonial legacy of residential schools in Canada has contributed directly to these socio-economic gaps and a host of socio-economic challenges for survivors and intergenerational survivors. These challenges range from alcohol and drug abuse to low self-esteem and teen pregnancy. All of these issues have a significant impact on educational outcomes. Some of the more direct impacts of the residential school experience include

14 Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 37.

15 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Provincial Panel on Student Achievement*, 16.

16 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Provincial Panel on Student Achievement*, 16.

17 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, *Provincial Panel on Student Achievement*, 16.

18 Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 19, 26, 37, 48–49.

19 Wilson, "Money Talks"; Wilson, "Go South Young Man."

20 Wilson, "Money Talks"; Wilson, "Go South Young Man."

21 Wilson, "Sleeping on the Couch"; Wilson, "Needs Major Repairs."

22 Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 47–48.

The Residential School Experience

Residential schools and other social and individual trauma have left lasting marks on many Northern Aboriginal communities. Although not formally established until the late 19th century, the residential school system has existed in various forms since the mid-1600s in New France. In the mid-1800s, the British and subsequently Canadian governments began to enact laws such as the *Indian Act* that were meant to assimilate Aboriginal people.[1] In the mid-1880s, the Canadian government began to partner with religious institutions to provide education for Aboriginal people in the form of residential or industrial schools, and "[i]n 1884, the *Indian Act* was amended to include compulsory residential school attendance for status Indians under age 16."[2]

By removing Aboriginal children from their communities and forcing them to attend these schools, it was argued that they would become self-reliant adults. As such, formal partnership between the government and churches was established in 1892 for the delivery of education.[3] By 1930, approximately 80 residential schools were in operation by various church groups across Canada. Funding for the schools was in short supply and soon disease, overcrowding, and malnutrition were widespread. The education the students received was also generally of a poor quality. Numerous cases of abuse were documented. This combination left many former students with difficult and painful memories of their experiences.[4]

Although the Canadian government officially abolished the residential school system in 1969, the last residential school closed in 1996. Many communities continue to suffer after-effects brought on by their experiences, including a loss of identity, violence, and substance abuse. The Canadian government officially apologized for the residential school system in 2008.[5]

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1 Miller, "Residential Schools."

2 Miller, "Residential Schools."

3 Aboriginal Healing Foundation, "A Condensed Timeline of Events."

4 Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *The Healing Has Begun*, 5–7.

5 Miller, "Residential Schools."

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and 23 per cent of non-Aboriginal people.[24] A focus on the educational deficits of Aboriginal people, however, overlooks positive learning outcomes and does not account for the unique economic, social, and political realities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.[25] This Aboriginal education gap may reflect the need for healing and the need for an approach that defines and measures educational success differently. According to the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), current data are based on normative measures, which overlook life-long, holistic—physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional—and experiential learning that takes place beyond the classroom. All of these elements can be important aspects of Aboriginal learning.[26] Furthermore, there is a need for more culturally relevant curriculum and education delivery mechanisms that are community-controlled and community-centred. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit advocate for their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions, and values, as well as access to non-Aboriginal education options. Many Aboriginal leaders recognize that providing access to "two ways of knowing" will help "to foster healthy, sustainable communities."[27]

Aboriginal communities are increasingly administering educational programs and services, creating their own institutions, and developing community-based language and culture programs, and culturally relevant curriculum.[28] Many communities are making progress in this regard, largely through self-government and land claim agreements. However, often the provisions for education in these agreements are too vague, and communities lack the resources and capacity to adequately implement and evaluate the impact of these programs.[29]

'fear of personal growth' and 'educational blocks'— aversions to formal learning programs that seem 'too much like school,' fear of failure, self-sabotage, [and] psychologically based learning disabilities."[23]

Correspondingly, Aboriginal educational outcomes across Canada lag those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts nationally. In 2006, only 60 per cent of Aboriginal people in Canada graduated from high school and 8 per cent graduated from university, compared with 87 per cent

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23 Native Women's Association of Canada as cited in Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 5.

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24 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 6. However, the gap is generally much narrower when post-secondary attainment (trade school, college, or university) is measured. In 2006, 41 per cent of Aboriginal people and 56 per cent of non-Aboriginals had a post-secondary education.

25 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 6.

26 Canadian Council on Learning, *Redefining How Success Is Measured*, 2.

27 Canadian Council on Learning, *Redefining How Success Is Measured*, 2.

28 Canadian Council on Learning, *Redefining How Success Is Measured*, 2.

29 Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 3.

For example, inadequate resources limited the capacity of the Cree to implement culturally appropriate Cree curriculum that the Cree school board established following the settlement of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975.[30] Furthermore, the 2006 Berger Commission on Inuit education drew national attention to the need for improved education in Nunavut: "[o]nly 25 per cent of Inuit children graduate from high school, and by no means all of these graduates go on to post-secondary education."[31] Considering these types of educational outcomes in the territory, filling 85 per cent of public service positions with Inuit—as set out in Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement— seems unrealistic.

Aboriginal education has emerged as a major priority for national Métis, First Nation, and Inuit organizations in Canada.

The importance of closing the national Aboriginal educational gap is increasingly being studied, including estimates of the financial benefits to individuals and society.[32] Consequently, education has emerged as a major priority for national Métis, First Nation, and Inuit organizations in Canada. Métis National Council (MNC) Chief Clem Chartier, for example, has raised the need for the support of federal leadership in regard to "a multilateral approach to Métis education and health."[33] And National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Shawn Atleo, has highlighted the importance of closing educational disparities and improving educational outcomes to prepare "the next generation of leaders for First Nations governance."[34] President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Mary Simon, has noted that "there is a need to address the enduring legacies [of residential schools] by closing the resource gap that inhibits Inuit educational achievement as well as by supporting the preservation of Inuit language and culture."[35] Simon has emerged as a key proponent for the National Committee on Inuit Education's June 2011 *First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education 2011*. This strategy aims to address other gaps that surround Inuit education, such as the lack of Inuit-specific, evidence-based research to inform policy development and advice. Furthermore, "[n]o studies have yet focused on organizational change in education or the impact of changes in governance structures or policy."[36] This framework is an important step in addressing the gap in educational outcomes for Inuit youth and education.[37]

It is clear that communities are better able to support and enhance positive educational outcomes when income levels are high, jobs are available, crime rates are low, and housing is in good condition.[38] It is also clear that educational attainment in Northern Canada is not on par with the rest of the country, and that attainment varies widely among Northern communities and, especially, Aboriginal populations. So which factors best support and enhance the educational outcomes of Northerners? And which policies and investments are required for the development and delivery of appropriate educational programming in the North?

30   Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 3.

31   Berger, *Report Summary, Berger 2006*, 4; Berger, *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Implementation*, iii. The National Committee on Inuit Education's *First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education* (page 98) also discusses graduation rates. The strategy states that "Inuit Grade 12 graduation rates are variously estimated in publications at around 25 per cent, but no firm data are available from any of the four jurisdictions or Statistics Canada. Graduation rates are a factor of total population, which Statistics Canada does measure."

32   See Howe, *Bridging the Aboriginal Education Gap*.

33   Smith, "Federal Election 2011."

34   Smith, "Federal Election 2011."

35   Smith, "Federal Election 2011."

36   National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 99.

37   National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*.

38   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 19, 26, 37, 48–49.

First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education

First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education 2011 was released in June 2011. It is the culmination of a multi-year initiative aimed at improving the educational outcomes for Inuit students across the Inuit Nunangat—the Inuit homeland. The strategy hopes to draw attention to the educational needs of Inuit children, as "[t]he stark reality of Inuit education today is that roughly 75 [per cent] of Inuit children are not completing high school and some who do graduate find that their education doesn't compare to that of non-Aboriginal Canadians."[1]

The report, authored by the National Committee of Inuit Education, highlights six core themes that will enable success: "bilingual education, mobilizing parents, Inuit-centred curriculum and teaching practices, post-secondary success, capacity building, and collecting and sharing information."[2]

The strategy also provides 10 recommendations for investment, flowing from the National Committee's research on the six core themes mentioned above.
1. Mobilizing Parents.
2. Developing Leaders in Inuit Education.
3. Increasing the Number of Bilingual Educators and Programs.
4. Investing in the Early Years.
5. Strengthening Kindergarten to Grade 12 by Investing in Inuit-Centred Curriculum and Language Resources.
6. Improving Services to Students Who Require Additional Support.
7. Increasing Success in Post-Secondary Education.
8. Establishing a University in Inuit Nunangat.
9. Establishing a Standardized Inuit Language Writing System.
10. Measuring and Assessing Success.[3]

The strategy also recommends the continued work of the National Committee on Inuit Education, as well as the creation of an Inuit Education Secretariat. These organizations would provide the capacity needed to ensure the implementation of the 10 recommendations, as well as the coordination of efforts across the North.[4] By changing the education system, Inuit leaders hope to help Inuit students gain a 21st century education, become knowledgeable of their cultural and linguistic contributions to Canada, and continue to contribute to Inuit, Canadian, and global society.[5]

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1 National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 67.

2 National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 8.

3 National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 9.

4 National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 92.

5 National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*, 70.

Source: National Committee on Inuit Education, *First Canadians, Canadians First*.

Understanding the Challenges and Measuring Educational Outcomes in the North

Chapter Summary

- Northern communities with higher levels of education tend to have more positive socio-economic conditions.

- Positive educational outcomes are influenced by learner readiness, learner support, educational access, and educational awareness and responsiveness.

- Northerners are generally not at parity with the South in terms of these factors, which serves to explain the generally lower educational outcomes.

There are interrelated factors contributing to educational success in the North. These are presented first through the perspectives of our interviewees, and second through a statistical analysis of the impact of various factors on educational outcomes. The analysis of these factors and perspectives confirms that policies and programs aimed at supporting and enhancing positive educational outcomes in the North should focus primarily on improving social conditions—especially housing, support for single-parent families, and crime prevention. Furthermore, in some regions, Northerners need increased access to schools and other educational resources, as well as economic opportunities and assistance with income-related barriers. The analysis also suggests that an Aboriginal-specific set

of policies might be appropriate, given that social and access-related challenges tend to be more acute, and other socio-cultural needs tend to be present in Northern Aboriginal communities.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

From January to April 2011, Northern educators, administrators, experts, and community representatives were interviewed about their views on educational outcomes in Northern communities.[1] Interviewees included a cross-section of males and females, First Nation, Inuit and Métis, and non-Aboriginal, who collectively represent all 10 Northern regions.[2] These consultations garnered views on how educational success should be defined in Northern communities. All participants agreed that educational success is defined by both academic and personal success. Other views noted that educational success:

- provides youth and young adults with options in life and enlightenment;
- brings social wellness and healthier societies;
- comes when education is relevant and when measures are developed collaboratively with students;

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1 While the views expressed cannot be considered representative of all Northerners, they do provide a range of perspectives from those with expertise and front-line experience, across all of the Northern regions included in the Centre for the North's boundary consideration.

2 For more information about these interviews, please see the interview guide in Appendix B.

- results from a fine balance between school and life experiences;
- is the end outcome and measured by how students function in society when they leave school (such as seeking further education, employment, volunteering, or even just setting life goals); and
- comes from having students see themselves in the education system, and from having Northerners as staff and faculty in educational institutions.

One interviewee commented: "[s]ome students fail to graduate [from high school] but still continue on to achieve post-secondary success. Students who do this exhibit educational success."[3] This suggests, as noted in CMEC's framework on education, that outcomes are best understood through a life course approach.

We also asked the interviewees how educational success should be measured in the North. There was a mix of views, including it should:

- be measured by completion of post-secondary studies, not simply participation;
- be less focused on outcomes and test scores and more centred on a humanist approach that considers the development of personality and self-esteem;
- be a combination of graduation, grades, resiliency, and personal growth, and result in a functioning, engaged, productive member of society;
- include basic measures, such as graduation and retention rates;
- include measures of parental involvement and adult role models;
- be based on achievement in courses that are the same calibre as the rest of the country;
- consider measures such as Youth Resilience Factors and Youth Development Assets;[4,5]

- engage students in setting SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goals as part of the measurement process;[6] and
- go beyond basic quantitative outcomes and consider a measure of societal wellness.

These findings support the Arctic Social Indicators project recommendations—that participation and graduation rates are important to measure. The importance of additional factors—such as resiliency and personal growth—were also emphasized.

Interviewees noted the lack of response of educational systems and organizations to the needs of communities— especially capacity issues.

Interviewees further highlighted that Northern educational outcomes are better understood within the context of the socio-economic profile of the North, and in relation to both the socio-economic circumstances and historical experiences of Northern Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. They emphasized poor school attendance— saying that it occurs for a variety of reasons, including the need for older students to stay home and care for younger children—as well as high drop-out levels, and substance abuse and addiction among some youth and parents. They also noted the lack of response of educational systems and organizations to the needs of communities. Capacity issues were of particular concern. Interviewees noted:

- poor retention of school staff;
- high turnover rates;
- shortages of teachers in subjects such as math and science;
- the need for students to travel outside home communities to attend higher levels of education;
- lengthy distances to travel each day to school;
- frequent school closures because of weather, road conditions, or other factors; and
- a lack of post-secondary education facilities in the North.

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3 Davis, interview, March 30, 2011.

4 The 40 Development Assets are an educational tool developed by the Search Institute. They are "building blocks of healthy development [...] that help young children grow up healthy, caring, and responsible." They are available for several age groups, and can be found at www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets/lists.

5 Anonymous interviewees, interviews, January 10 and 17, 2011.

6 Anonymous interviewees, interviews, January 10 and 17, 2011.

Furthermore, interviewees noted a lack of culturally appropriate curriculum, particularly for some communities with large Aboriginal populations. And the high cost of delivering education in Northern communities is an additional challenge. Finally, interviewees were concerned about poor community retention of youth who have completed higher education. This concern is reflected in the Arctic Social Indicators project, which recommended monitoring the number of graduates who remain in the community 10 years later.

Interviewees noted a lack of culturally appropriate curriculum, particularly for some communities with large Aboriginal populations.

Other challenges identified through the interviews include increased demands on limited funding by students wishing to undertake post-secondary studies; the need for school repair or replacement; poor housing for teachers; a lack of access to current technology and resources, such as computer and science laboratories; and a lack of early childhood learning opportunities.

Overall, there was a wide range of opinions expressed in the interviews, but there was also convergence around four key themes:

1. Positive educational outcomes derive from a strong family and community support.
2. Outcomes are enhanced when the cultural and linguistic needs and desires of students and their communities are reflected in relevant curriculum, delivery methods, and measures of success.
3. Outcomes should be gauged by both *academic success*—grades, graduation, and retention rates—and *personal success*—resiliency, good citizenry, independent thinking, desire for lifelong learning, and employability.
4. Positive educational outcomes are enhanced when students have access to quality resources—such as teachers and specialists, curriculum, facilities, and technology.

STATISTICAL FINDINGS

A statistical analysis was conducted for this report to test which variables are most important to educational outcomes in the North. Based on the literature reviewed and data availability,[7] nine variables were selected:

1. Proportion of Aboriginal population
2. Crime rate
3. Income level
4. Employment rate
5. Economic diversity
6. Number of schools
7. Number of teachers
8. Proportion of single-parent families
9. Life expectancy at birth

For this exercise, we wanted to establish how important each of these variables is to determining three levels of educational attainment: high school, post-secondary, and university. This analysis does not determine, by itself, cause and effect relationships between these variables and educational attainment. However, by scanning the empirical literature and conducting interviews with Northerners for this report, we were able to make inferences about the importance of these variables to educational outcomes.

Data were collected on a cross-section of 1,168 census subdivisions in the North using 2006 as the reference year.[8] The level of educational attainment data is represented by the highest level of schooling for the population aged 25 to 64. For comparison purposes, all data were expressed in relative terms. In order to determine the degree of dependence between our nine variables and the three levels of educational attainment, we calculated correlation coefficients using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, commonly known as "Pearson's r." Further empirical analysis could focus on understanding the causes and effects of educational attainment in the North. This would be much simpler with multiple years

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7   Other relevant factors found in the literature could not be tested because of a lack of appropriate data.

8   This was the last year of available census data when this report was written. The census data used include all communities in Canada's North, using the CFN Northern boundary. None of these are divided by on-reserve/off-reserve indicators.

of data, given that we have a large sample of 1,168 census subdivisions. As it stands, since only one year of data (2006) is being examined, our analysis focuses on the correlation coefficient, which measures the linear dependence between two variables.

When analyzing Pearson's r, a coefficient of 1 signifies perfect correlation, such that the determinant perfectly explains educational attainment. A coefficient of –1 also means perfect correlation, but in a negative manner. A coefficient of zero implies no dependence between the two variables. Thus, there are varying degrees of correlation (strong, medium, small, and none), depending on how far the coefficient is from 1 (or –1).[9] The correlation coefficients for our key determinants are presented in Table 2 below, along with their degree of correlation.

Keep in mind that the purpose of this analysis is to determine dependence between two variables, not cause and effect. For example, Table 2 shows a strong negative correlation between Aboriginal population and post-secondary education. Simply put, communities

with a higher proportion of Aboriginals tend to have a lower number of its citizens completing post-secondary studies. However, it does not suggest that the greater number of Aboriginals is the reason for lower educational attainment. However, the fact that the correlation coefficient is closer to –1 implies the relationship between the two variables is significantly negative.

A high proportion of Aboriginal residents, poor social conditions, and limited access to educational opportunities correlate with poor educational outcomes.

This is contrasted by employment, which exhibits a strong positive relationship with post-secondary attainment. Indeed, communities with a higher number of post-secondary graduates tend to have stronger employment growth, but perusing the results in Table 2 tells us that household income and economic diversity also positively affect post-secondary attainment, albeit to a slightly lesser extent.

A statistical relationship does not necessarily exist between all variables. In fact, the estimated coefficient for the number of schools is close to zero (–0.0024).

9   If x denotes the absolute value of Pearson's r, then: $x > 0.5$ = strong correlation; $0.5 < x < 0.3$ = medium correlation; $0.3 < x < 0.1$ = weak correlation; and $0.1 < x < 0$ = no correlation.

Table 2
Correlation Findings
(correlation coefficients)

Variables	High School	Post-Secondary	University
Aboriginal population	−0.5798 (strong)	−0.5554 (strong)	−0.3414 (medium)
Crime	−0.3610 (medium)	−0.2998 (medium)	−0.1714 (small)
Household income	0.2079 (small)	0.3777 (medium)	0.3616 (medium)
Economic diversity	0.1620 (small)	0.3664 (medium)	0.3196 (medium)
Crowded homes	−0.4929 (strong)	−0.5073 (strong)	−0.2740 (medium)
Life expectancy	0.3159 (medium)	0.0705 (none)	−0.0169 (none)
Single-parent families	−0.3714 (medium)	−0.4169 (medium)	−0.2497 (small)
Employment	0.3225 (medium)	0.5177 (strong)	0.4393 (medium)
Number of teachers	0.1167 (small)	0.2496 (small)	0.3899 (medium)
Number of schools	−0.0356 (none)	−0.0024 (none)	0.1077 (small)

Note: Findings are based on the highest level of schooling for the population aged 25 to 64.
Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

This implies that there is basically no linear dependence between the presence of schools and post-secondary educational attainment in each community.

In summary, the results reveal that a high proportion of Aboriginal residents, poor social conditions, and (to a lesser degree) limited access to educational opportunities correlate with poor educational outcomes in general. Moreover, they show that low income and a lack of economic diversity correlate with poor tertiary education outcomes. Communities with higher levels of education tended to have more positive socio-economic conditions.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: A CYCLE OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Taken together, an analysis of these qualitative and quantitative data suggests that communities with higher levels of education tend to have more positive socio-economic conditions. And, furthermore, there is over-whelming consensus that education is critical to Northern communities and Northern economies. As a result of this analysis, a few key inferences can be made about the challenges and determinants of educational out-comes in the North.

Where the Aboriginal population is proportionately higher, high school, post-secondary, and university attainment rates are all lower. The relationship between these vari-ables may be explained by the generally poorer socio-economic and health outcomes, limited access to schools and culturally appropriate curriculum, and intergenera-tional impacts of residential schools that figure more prominently in Aboriginal communities. These variables are understood to be at the root of this trend.

Also, social conditions and access to teachers are import-ant factors in high school attainment. The analysis shows that as crowded homes, single-parent families, and crime decrease and the number of schools and employment rates increase, high school attainment increases. These findings are not surprising. Children need adequate and quiet space to do homework, ample assistance with their

homework, and safe and secure learning environments. The data suggest that these optimal learning conditions are more often unavailable to Northerners. Moreover, this analysis shows that these social conditions are interrelated and, thus, reinforce one another in addition to reinforcing educational attainment.

Beyond healthy and secure communities, students also need schools in which to learn. Alternatively, e-learning is being used in communities that lack a brick and mortar school or to complement in-person learning where there are shortages of teachers or other educational resources—such as libraries, museums, or science laboratories. Effective e-learning requires supporting "software licensing, technical infrastructure, equipment, and technicians."[10]

E-learning is being used in communities that lack a brick and mortar school or to complement in-person learning where there are shortages of teachers or other educational resources.

While social conditions and access remain important to post-secondary and university attainment, income and economic diversity[11] also play significant roles. Specifically, when income and economic diversity increase, higher educational attainment increases. The importance of income in tertiary educational attainment may be attributed to tuition and book costs as well as expenses related to leaving the community to pursue further education. It is also possible that post-secondary educated families tend to have higher incomes, and that this trend is cyclical. For example, high income leads to educational attainment, which then leads to high income. Similarly, the increased importance of economic diversity to tertiary education could indicate that economic diversity inspires tertiary education, and that those with high post-secondary education create jobs or diverse economies. While this analysis does not prove a cause

10 Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, iii.

11 These two variables are virtually unimportant in high school attainment.

and effect relationship, there is ample evidence (including the literature reviewed and interviews conducted) to suggest that some barriers to tertiary education are likely income-related.

The data also show that positive educational outcomes are linked with positive social conditions—each reinforcing the other.

These data also suggest that social conditions reinforce one another. As well as educational outcomes,[12] social outcomes are interrelated—including crime, employment, crowded homes, single-parent families, and income. (See Exhibit 2.) The data also show that positive educational outcomes are linked with positive social conditions—such as low crime, high employment and income, and better housing conditions—each reinforcing the other. In other words, positive educational outcomes and thriving communities go together.

Exhibit 2
Cogs of Social Conditions and Educational Outcomes
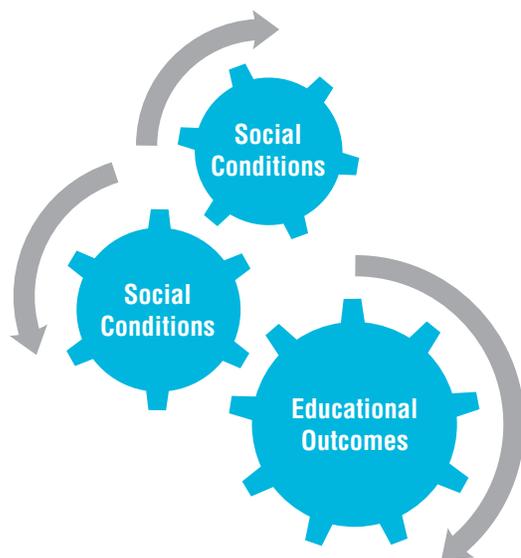
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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12 The statistical analysis cannot prove cause and effect relationships. However, together with the other data collected in this report, there is reason to infer that social conditions reinforce one another—including positive educational outcomes.

In some Northern communities, the cogs are perpetually moving in a negative direction. Integrated policies that aim to improve educational outcomes—directly through education policy and indirectly through social programming—are needed to propel and sustain the cycle's movement in a positive direction. Again, while many of the findings above might apply equally in a Southern context, what differs is the context. For example, poor social conditions tend to be more prevalent in the North and access to educational institutions and resources are limited in many Northern communities, relative to the South.

Overall, the data analysis suggests that certain factors are more influential on positive educational outcomes than others. Four specific factors of influence on educational outcomes emerged from our research. These include:

1. **Learner readiness**—includes psychological wellness and preparedness to learn, such as mindset and attitude. Aboriginal Northerners who have been affected by residential schools and other historical traumas may require healing in order to be learner-ready. Learner mindset and attitude might also include motivation or aspirations to become educated, which could be influenced by local employment opportunities or lack thereof. Learner readiness also includes socio-economic wellness and safe and secure learning environments—such as food security, adequate housing needs, and freedom from violence.

2. **Learner support**—includes community and family support, which could manifest in various ways, such as encouragement, academic interest, assistance with homework, and the provision of resources.

3. **Educational access**—includes access to learning opportunities through educational institutions and resources, such as schools, libraries, museums, and teachers. This also includes access to culturally appropriate curriculum and educational delivery, and education that meets language needs—all of which are particularly important in Northern Aboriginal communities.

4. **Educational awareness and responsiveness**—includes ongoing assessments and revisions to educational programming to ensure that educational programming and delivery is effective.

It is important to note that these four factors are inter-related. For example, psychological well-being is related to socio-economic well-being and safety; preparedness to learn is related to community and family support; and ongoing assessments of educational programming and delivery are related to access to education that is responsive to community and cultural needs. While

these influences on positive educational outcomes might apply equally in the South, the context is quite differ-ent. The research shows Northerners are generally not at parity with the South in terms of learner readiness, learner support, educational access, or awareness and responsiveness, which serves to explain the generally lower educational outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

What's Being Done? Education in Action

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Chapter Summary

◆ Northern students need educational programming that responds to the region's unique and varied needs, including appropriate cultural content and measures that ensure language retention.

◆ Education needs to take into account a community's social needs.

◆ Schools in the North are being used as hubs through service integration and for cultural and social activities.

◆ Partnerships and collaboration between communities and post-secondary institutions play an important role in Northern education—and many such partnerships exist.

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Although students and educators in Northern communities confront many challenges, Northern educators, schools and institutions, students, and communities are achieving promising results in educational outcomes. The examples that follow in this chapter are a sample of the many practices and models being adopted in Northern communities. There are several key elements in educational design and delivery that are proving effective in helping Northerners to overcome some of the unique challenges they face. The incorporation of these elements into education programs are already showing the early signs of having a positive impact. These elements can be broken down into five broad areas:

1. **Content** that is responsive to the unique and varied needs of Northerners. These include programs that build pathways to further education and employment, provide adequate cultural content and pedagogy, and focus on language retention and revitalization.

2. **Delivery** of education content that overcomes infrastructural and cultural challenges. These include learner-centred models with a significant technological component, and engaging models that provide flexibility and respect for cultural inclusivity.

3. **Local and sustainable capacity and leadership** in education. This requires an investment in local talent and leadership, as well as greater incentives for Southern-trained educators to stay in the North.

4. **Schools that function as hubs.** This helps to reduce an infrastructure deficit and to break down barriers between education and community development.

5. **Partnerships** that connect educational institutions with one another and with communities. These are an essential element for achieving educational success in the North and occur, at many levels, between communities, schools, government, and local business leaders.

ELEMENTS OF DEVELOPING RESPONSIVE NORTHERN CONTENT

Contrary to common belief, the North is, in fact, very ethnoculturally diverse. Northerners include Métis, Inuit, and various First Nations people, as well as many who identify as English, French, Eastern European, Asian, Arab, and/or African, among other ethnicities.[1] Additionally, the North consists of numerous subcultures informed by local histories, cultures, industries, politics, and land, among other factors.

Many Northern students have difficulty answering questions about things to which they cannot relate, such as city blocks or tall buildings.

Northern students require educational programming that responds to their unique and varied needs, and is based on a system that is flexible and accommodates the various cultures, languages, and traditions of Northern communities. However, simultaneously accommodating the needs of many different ethnocultural groups with limited resources can be challenging. Consequently, many Northern schools follow curriculum borrowed from the South. This curriculum does not address the special needs of Northerners. And many Northern students do not relate to an education system that draws upon examples from major urban regions in the South. In addition to being culturally relevant, educational programming must also be specific to the community to which it is administered. According to a 2002 research report on education in Northern Alberta, a lack of relevance in this regard has led to poor scores on provincial standardized tests—students have difficulty answering questions about things to which they cannot relate, such as city blocks or tall buildings.[2]

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1   The North scored a 1.54 on the Conference Board's diversity index, compared with 1.8 in the South, out of a range of 2.5. The index used is an adapted version of the Shannon Diversity Index originally developed to benchmark diversity in horticulture. Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 6.

2   Goddard and Foster, "Adapting to Diversity," 9–10.

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The creation of pathways to post-secondary education and employment is perhaps one of the most important elements of educational programming in the North. The lower attainment, and sometimes achievement rates, in the North can be partly attributed to a lack of preparation for tertiary education options.[3] Many Northerners are leaving high school without the skills necessary to transition smoothly into post-secondary schooling. Some communities, however, are providing intervention resources designed to assist students with this transition. For example, the governments of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, with support from a number of sponsors, offer the Northern Student Education Initiative.[4] Through this program, a social worker helps Northern students who have left home to attend post-secondary studies or training in the Edmonton region, providing information and advice as they adjust to their new circumstances.

Pathways to post-secondary schooling and employment require that educational institutions and governing bodies work together. The lack of communication and coordination between high schools in some Northern communities and post-secondary institutions might be a contributing factor. Interviewees noted that education needs to be a continuum and not separate islands. Some post-secondary programs, such as those offered through University College of the North, are working with school divisions to ensure that K-12 students are being adequately prepared for post-secondary programs. Adult learning centres and gap transition programs are offered in the North to assist adults who have not completed high school and are returning to school.

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3   High school and university attainment rates in the North lag behind those of their Southern counterparts: 77.7 and 16.2 per cent, compared with 85 and 28.7 per cent, respectively. This gap narrows significantly when North and South are compared on post-secondary attainment in general (college, university, or trades school), with 53.9 per cent of Northerners attaining post-secondary education, compared with 61.1 per cent in the South.

4   Government of Northwest Territories, *Northern Student Education Initiative*.

Some students, however, are unable to participate in skill training that is made available because they do not have the minimum skill requirement or literacy levels, leading to a cycle of skill shortages. Several educational bridging programs that provide pre-training and up-skilling are addressing this issue in Northern communities. Nunavut Sivunitsavut College, for example, is an Ottawa-based training school for "Inuit youth from Nunavut who want to prepare for the educational, training, and career opportunities that are being created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the Government of Nunavut."[5] And the School of Access at Yukon College offers a college and career preparation program that allows students to gain the required courses for vocational or technical courses.[6]

Career preparation programs are assisting students in many Northern communities to create career pathways by allowing them to gain experience in their desired fields. This helps students make the link between educational outcomes and economic success. Students in Northern communities are often encouraged to go to university without consideration of college or trade school programs. Innovative programs, such as

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5   Nunavut Sivuniksavut College, "Welcome."

6   Yukon College, "College and Career Preparation Programs."

Nunavut Sivuniksavut

Established in 1985, Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) is an Ottawa-based college program originally developed to "train fieldworkers who could keep people in the Northern communities informed about the progress of land claims negotiations"[1] and to "prepare [Inuit youth] for involvement in the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement [(NLCA)]."[2] Following the 1993 signing of the NLCA, NS has evolved into a transitional program designed to prepare Inuit youth who are NLCA beneficiaries for post-secondary education or immediate employment in the Nunavut workforce, especially opportunities created by NLCA and the Government of Nunavut.[3]

Every year, approximately 22 students are selected to participate in NS. Over the course of the eight-month program, these students learn about Inuit culture, history, and organizations, as well as "land claims and other issues relevant to their future careers in Nunavut."[4] Students visit public institutions, hear from prominent Inuit leaders, build research skills in their home communities, and share the knowledge they gain about Inuit and Nunavut with the community.[5] Students also share cultural knowledge on a year-end international Indigenous-exchange.[6]

Additionally, the NS program equips students with life skills, supporting their transition into independent, healthy adults, and preparing them for life in the city.[7] Students are provided with apartments to share in groups of 2–4 and receive ongoing support from staff members, who teach them about aspects of a healthy lifestyle—including purchasing affordable clothing and food, cooking skills, and healthy community activities.[8]

Upon completion, students receive an Algonquin College certificate and transcript.[9] Moreover, some NS course credits can be transferred to Arctic College programs, such as management studies.[10] NS has a strong track record of successful students. NS alumni include Inuit leaders such as Sheila Watt-Cloutier, former President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council; Nancy Karetak Lindell, Nunavut Member of Parliament; and Peter Irniq, former Commissioner of Nunavut.[11]

1   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "History."

2   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Purpose."

3   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Purpose."

4   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Purpose."

5   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Typical Year."

6   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Typical Year."

7   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Purpose."

8   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Typical Year."

9   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Affiliation."

10   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Affiliation."

11   Nunavut Sivuniksavut, "Typical Year."

Source: Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program, www.nstraining.ca.

Ontario's Mining Essentials Program, and the partnerships between Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's (NAIT) and industry,[7] are filling this gap. However, educational programming that focuses too narrowly on local industry may limit options for personal and professional growth, and create dependencies on industries that may not have a sustainable presence in the community. The reality in the North today is that many jobs are related to industry in some way. The important element to consider in building pathways to positive educational outcomes is to stress that there are many types of employment opportunities within industry—from management, to high-tech trades, to hospitality.

Students are often encouraged to go to university without consideration of college or trade school programs.

Northerners are also seeking to balance their unique lifestyles and participation in their traditional economies with the requirements of building pathways and links between positive educational outcomes and economic success in the wage labour economy. For example, Northern students should be prepared to work in resource extraction industries. but also gain an understanding of the impacts of resource extraction on the land to ensure the continuity of local environmental advocates. Linking traditional economies and lifestyles with these pathways requires leadership and local capacity, as well as respect for alternative methods of delivery and culturally appropriate content.

Building pathways to post-secondary schooling and employment also depends on financial support. The cost of post-secondary schooling can be a major deterrent for some Northerners. In some Northern communities, local teenagers are being recruited to work in local industries prior to graduation from high school. As a result, some Northerners are opting for the short-term certainty of a decent wage over the further educational and employment opportunities that remaining in school might present.[8] For example, in one Northern Alberta

community where industry was recruiting high school students prior to their completion of school, there was previously no culture of post-secondary schooling because work was too accessible. Since the economic slowdown in 2008, however, there has been a great deal of academic upgrading in that community.

It is now standard practice for many mining companies in the North to refrain from "poaching" high school students and to recruit high school graduates. In fact, to address high drop-out rates in many Northern communities, some businesses have developed educational programs of their own or provided financial support for essential skills development. For example, De Beers Books in Homes program provides books to several Aboriginal communities close to its Snap Lake mine. Introduced in 2003, the program provides three new books to each student every year. About 21,000 books have been supplied since the program started. De Beers' employees help deliver the books to the students, and emphasize the importance of staying in school.[9] As part of the program, De Beers also partnered with the NWT Literacy Council to bring literacy coordinators from communities around the Snap Lake mine together for training so they can facilitate family literacy in their own communities.[10] And the company has worked with the student financial assistance office of the Government of NWT to help high school students in smaller communities learn about the post-secondary financial supports that are available.

Ice Fishing Cultural Outing
Source: Sheshatshiu Innu School.

7   Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, "About NAIT."

8   Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 7; Anonymous interviewee, interview, February 25, 2011.

9   De Beers Canada, *Snap Lake Mine*.

10   De Beers Canada, *De Beers Canada Partners With NWT Literacy Council*.

ADEQUATE CULTURAL CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

The 2006 Berger Commission on Inuit education drew national attention to the inappropriateness of a "cookie cutter" approach to Northern education. In its examination of Inuit education in Nunavut, Berger's report discusses the detrimental impact that learning in English has on Inuit students. The report holds that Inuit students begin learning in English in Grades 4 or 5 and Inuktitut becomes a subject "like math or a foreign language."[11] According to Berger, this leads to Inuktitut language loss, illiteracy in both English and Inuktitut, and a damaged self-image for Inuit.[12] Inuit content and ways of knowing also appear to be marginal in the Alberta curriculum, which has been used in Nunavut leading up to the Berger Commission.[13] The Commission has resulted in the creation of a curriculum (currently under way) for Nunavut that includes greater use of Inuktitut and foregrounds Inuit content.[14] For example, the thematic teaching model aims to enhance culturally appropriate programming. Each month is assigned a theme and units follow seasons. For example, students learn about plants and family in August; water and ocean life in September; polar bears, ice, and weather predictions in October; and so forth.

The 2006 Berger Commission on Inuit education drew national attention to the inappropriateness of a "cookie cutter" approach to Northern education.

According to a 2009 Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) report, ". . . learning from—and about—culture, language, and tradition is critical to the well-being of Aboriginal people."[15] Paul Martin's Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI)[16] is working directly with organizations and programs designed to enhance and

support Aboriginal content and pedagogy for classroom and online learning for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.[17] Other programs, such as the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (a pre-school program), deliver health and wellness programs to Aboriginal children and their families, providing ". . . Aboriginal children with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for lifelong learning, and opportunities to develop into successful young people."[18] Moreover, in all three territories, French-language school boards provide French-language education programs for students through several schools as well as two daycares. The schools ensure that francophones in the territories are able to retain ties to their language and culture.[19]

PROVISIONS FOR LANGUAGE RETENTION AND REVITALIZATION

Language retention and revitalization are linked inextricably with culture, and provide a very important dimension to educational programming in the North.[20] English, French, and an array of Aboriginal and other languages are common across the North. In fact, there are 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories alone.[21] While there are French immersion programs at the secondary school level in some major centres, such as Yellowknife and Hay River, most of the K-12 models in the Northwest Territories resemble those used in Southern communities throughout Canada. This kind of programming revolves around the use of English as the language of instruction.

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11 Berger, *Report Summary, Berger 2006*, 4.

12 Berger, *Report Summary, Berger 2006*, 4.

13 Alberta Education, *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12*, 4.

14 Berger, *Report Summary, Berger 2006*, 4.

15 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 5.

16 Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, "Promising Practices in Aboriginal Education."

17 These programs include Métis Curriculum Advisory Committee of the Regina Public School Division #4; Saskatchewan['s] Aboriginal Themed Lesson Plans; Aboriginal Education Enhancement Branch's Shared Learnings; the integrated BC Aboriginal Content K-10 program in British Columbia; Aboriginal Curriculum Integration Project (ACIP); and the Ontario Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Perspectives: A Guide to the Teacher's Toolkit.

18 Public Health Agency of Canada, "Aboriginal Head Start."

19 There is a daycare and a school in Whitehorse, Yukon; two schools in the Northwest Territories; and a daycare and school in Nunavut. See Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest "À propos de nous"; Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, "À propos de la CSFY"; Commission scolaire francophone du Nunavut, "Accueil."

20 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 25.

21 Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, "General Information—Northwest Territories."

On the Land Programs

Part of the Beaufort Delta Education Council, the Moose Kerr School in Aklavik, Northwest Territories, offers its students opportunities to explore many traditional activities through the school's on the land programming. Cultural activities are organized seasonally, and are part of a student's daily activities within the school curriculum. Students learn about things such as berry picking, net and ice fishing, hunting and trapping, with the help of local Elders who provide traditional knowledge.

Students also learn skills such as land orienteering, tracking, cleaning and maintaining their tools, as well as the handling and care of various furs. These activities are integrated into the school's daily curriculum, along with classes in Aboriginal languages. Many of the cultural activities include a language component.

Programming instructors work in partnership with local hunters and trappers and the local renewable resources department, and parents and staff are encouraged to participate along with the children. Moose Kerr School also promotes a community cultural-based model, which draws on not only the curriculum used in the Northwest Territories, but also on the community's input. "This combination of their regular academic learning gives them a nice balance of learning from both traditional on land programming [and] academics for their school year."[1]

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1 Illasiak, interview, April 21, 2011.

Many Aboriginal languages in Canada are at risk. According to Statistics Canada's 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey results (the last data collected by Statistics Canada on Aboriginal languages), there are 50 or more Aboriginal languages and 11 Aboriginal language families in Canada.[22] For many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people, "these languages are at the very core of their identity."[23] Over the past century, at least 10 Aboriginal languages have disappeared, with only 24 per cent of Aboriginal peoples reporting the ability to carry on a conversation in an Aboriginal language in 2001; down from 29 per cent in 1996.[24] Although Inuit Inuktitut retention rates are relatively good, they are also

declining. Between 1996 and 2006, the proportion of Inuit speaking Inuktitut as their home language declined from 58 to 50 per cent and the proportion of Inuit speaking Inuktitut conversationally declined from 72 to 69 per cent.[25] According to a 2009 CCL report:

> Aboriginal children and youth reported that family provided the greatest support when it came to learning their ancestral language, as more than 41 per cent of off-reserve Aboriginal children and 77 per cent of Inuit children reported having someone in the community to help them understand their culture and history.[26]

The inclusion of language training and immersion in education stands to make a difference. The declining trends in the generational transmission of Aboriginal languages in Canada "are being offset to a degree by the fact that Aboriginal languages are also being learned as second languages."[27] For example, three Cree communities in Northern Saskatchewan—Onion Lake First Nation, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, and the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation—have successfully developed and implemented their own curriculum and language immersion programs and are now sharing these resources with other communities.[28] In the Northwest Territories, the Dene Kede curriculum includes provisions for the teaching of the Dene language to students. This ensures that many cultural experiences are presented and experienced in Dene, so that students may gain a better understanding of themselves, and connect to their culture and their communities.[29]

ELEMENTS OF ENSURING EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

The way in which education and learning is delivered in Northern communities is a key factor in achieving positive outcomes. Geography and poor infrastructure

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22 Norris, *Aboriginal Languages in Canada*.

23 Norris, *Aboriginal Languages in Canada*.

24 Norris, *Aboriginal Languages in Canada*.

25 Statistics Canada, *2006 Census*.

26 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 5.

27 Norris, *Aboriginal Languages in Canada*.

28 The Gift of Language and Culture Project, "Project Information."

29 Government of Northwest Territories, Department of Education, Culture and Employment, "Dene Kede Education."

The Gift of Language and Culture Project

The Gift of Language and Culture project is a "resource-based . . . instructional and immersion Cree language curriculum [Nursery–Grade 9]" that is accessible online.[1] The instructional program aims to preserve the Cree language by improving proficiency rates of students from Nursery to Grade 12.[2] The immersion program offers an Indigenous knowledge-centred curriculum in the Cree language that meets both the learning needs of students and provincial expectations.[3] The program was developed in 2003 through the collaborative efforts of Saskatchewan's Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB), Onion Lake First Nation (OLFN), and Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN) to address Cree language revitalization and retention needs across Saskatchewan First Nation schools.[4]

The Gift of Language and Culture website was developed by the Lac La Ronge Indian Band Curriculum Resource Unit (CRU), and contains resources designed to improve school effectiveness in teaching Woodland, Plains, and Swampy Cree, as well as Dene language and culture. The online nature of the program allows students to access resources at home as well.[5] The website includes immersion and instructional curriculum resources; interviews with Elders (video); a variety of interactive language learning resources for Woodland, Plains, and Swampy Cree; as well as Dene vocabulary exercises, audible resources, and syllabic matching. It also includes a calendar of Aboriginal language and culture events, a multimedia photo gallery, Cree songs and stories, and videos of Northern peoples.

1   The Gift of Language and Culture Project, "Project Information."

2   The Gift of Language and Culture Project, "Project Information.

3   The Gift of Language and Culture Project, "Project Information.

4   The Gift of Language and Culture Project, "The History."

5   Anonymous interviewee, interview, January 10, 2011; Canada Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*.

represent major challenges to education delivery in many Northern communities. The residential school legacy, and relocation in some Aboriginal communities, also poses unique systemic challenges revolving around trust and reconciling cultural values that may limit the effective delivery of educational programming in the North. However, learner-centred models—such as e-learning—that allow students to learn from their home communities, and engaging models that provide flexibility and cultural inclusivity, are all making headway in helping Northern communities to overcome these challenges and achieve positive educational outcomes.

CHALLENGES

Geography is one of the biggest challenges to achieving successful education outcomes in the North. Geographical location affects everything from acquiring resources to

attracting qualified personnel. Indeed, the North is a vast and sparsely populated place relative to the South "[accounting] for 80 per cent of Canada's land mass but only 6 per cent of its population—just over 2.1 million."[30] Consequently, the North consists of many remote communities with limited access to resources and, thus, many Northern communities face infrastructural challenges.[31]

While great strides are being made in terms of infrastructure development in the North, many Northern communities, especially Aboriginal communities, continue to face a shortage of brick and mortar schools and other learning institutions—such as libraries, museums, and computer and science laboratories.[32] Since 2000, the Cree community of Attawapiskat in Northern Ontario has been without an elementary school "after the old school was closed due to diesel fuel contamination."[33] The portables in which the students have been taught since the school closure are now beginning to deteriorate.[34] Other factors, such as crowded homes and homes in need of major repair, can also impact a student's ability to learn. Significant numbers of homes in Northern regions have been identified as needing major repairs or as being overcrowded, while many communities also lack basic communication and transportation infrastructure.[35]

Unique programs in the North are attempting to work around these geographical barriers. Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning in NWT offers university-accredited courses, and some Northern colleges are partnering with Southern universities to offer degree programs in select areas. The University of Northern British Columbia, University College of the North, Brandon University College, and Lakehead University, as well as Yukon College, Aurora Colleges, Nunavut Arctic Colleges, and Athabasca University, all provide opportunities to study at the post-secondary level in the North. However, there are currently no universities

30   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 6.

31   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 6.

32   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*; Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*.

33   *Wawatay News*, "Student Letter Campaign."

34   *Wawatay News*, "Student Letter Campaign."

35   Sisco and Stonebridge, *Toward Thriving Northern Communities*, 28–34.

in Canada's territorial north.[36] This forces many students to rely on distance education or relocate to urban centres in order to complete post-secondary education. However, issues relating to homesickness and culture shock often affect Inuit students who move south, and returning to their home communities after completing their studies is also sometimes difficult.[37]

Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning

Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning is a unique land-based approach to Northern and Aboriginal education. Its vision is to build "[d]ynamic, sustainable and self-determining Northern communities where human capacity is rooted in Indigenous knowledge and values." Described as a field school, students and researchers at the post-secondary level learn about Indigenous governance, theory, and traditional ways of life from many Northern experts. The curriculum is delivered in an off-grid, remote, eco-lodge—accessible only by ski, dogsled, or plane.

Dechinta is a 12-week university-accredited program. It also offers students the opportunity to engage in seasonal activities such as hunting, harvesting, or fishing led by local Elders. Along with other courses in a variety of topics—such as community research methodologies, health, and community wellness and sustainability—students gain the tools necessary to help build vibrant and sustainable Northern communities.

Source: Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning.

Adding to these challenges is a history of trauma associated with formal education and relocation in many communities. There also continues to be a suspicion of non-Aboriginal teachers and non-Aboriginal educational delivery mechanisms. A feeling of frustration exists that education and society are now just acknowledging residential school experiences and their repercussions. In the past, many Aboriginal children in the North attended residential schools, and other families and entire communities were relocated; some willingly and others not. (See box "Inuit Relocations.") These historical events have had intergenerational effects on many

Northerners and their impressions of the formal education system. These include socio-economic issues and a deep distrust of the formal Canadian education system. The older generation of Northerners, in particular, continues to view education as imposed.[38] As a result, younger students are lacking parental support for their pursuit of formal education, which is a significant driver of positive educational outcomes.[39]

As a result of residential school experience, the older generation of Northerners, in particular, continues to view education as imposed.

Delivering education to rural, remote, and isolated communities with unique needs, many of which suffer trauma, is challenging. It requires an approach that can overcome geographical, cultural, socio-economic, and historical barriers.[40]

PROVIDING A LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

A learner-centred approach to education is providing greater options for Northerners to learn from their home communities and ensure the effective delivery of educational programming in the North. E-learning, in particular, is significantly helping to overcome the infrastructural and geographic challenges of educational delivery. Although initially introduced by some as a solution to distance-related challenges to learning, e-learning is now providing students with access to a multitude of programs and educational options.[41] It is helping to eliminate distance "as a barrier to accessing education for students, so that [students] do not have to choose between their communities and formal education."[42]

36 Stevenson, *Dialogue Towards a University*, 4.

37 Stevenson, *Dialogue Towards a University*, 120–21.

38 Indian and Northern Affairs as cited in Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 4.

39 OECD, *Pathways to Success*, 50.

40 Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 1.

41 Lin and others, "Combination of Service Learning and Pre-Service Teacher Training"; OECD, *Pathways to Success*; Jones, "ICT and Future Teachers."

42 Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 10.

Inuit Relocations

Following the First World War, the Canadian government adopted a policy of Inuit relocation in parts of the eastern Arctic. At first, relocation was based on subsistence and preventing starvation in communities.[1] However, relocations beginning after the Second World War were motivated by reasons of sovereignty and security. Motivations for relocations were seldom clearly explained to the affected Inuit and often involved adaptations to new land, new animal migration patterns,[2] and in the case of the High Arctic locations "a colder climate and longer periods of total light or darkness."[3]

In 1953, families from the communities of Inukjuak and Pond Inlet were moved to Resolute Bay and Grise Fjord, in the High Arctic. When they arrived at the new locations, there were inadequate supplies of housing and food.[4] Resettlement of Inuit families and communities continued throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Although many families were promised that if they were unhappy in their new locations they would be able to return, ". . . they were discouraged from doing so and were, in fact, encouraged to have their relatives move to the High Arctic to join them."[5]

1   Public History Inc., *Canada's Relationship With Inuit*, 29.

2   Public History Inc., *Canada's Relationship With Inuit*, 30.

3   Public History Inc., *Canada's Relationship With Inuit*, 29.

4   Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*, 136–51.

5   Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*, 142.

Distance learning and e-learning have been successful at various times throughout Canada, and there are a number of e-learning programs currently servicing Canada's North.[43] Some forms of e-learning have been in place since the 1980s. Ontario, for example, established Contact North/Contact Nord in 1986. The program began as an audio and audio-graphic network, relying on simple teleconferencing and computing applications. Building upon technological advancements in software and connectivity, the program is now an online e-learning network that taps into the current vast social networking opportunities of

43   For example, DreamCatcher Mentoring in Yukon; Sunchild E-learning in Alberta; Credenda in Saskatchewan; Ontario's K-Net; and the Sioux Hudson Literacy Council's Good Learning Everywhere; and the soon-to-be developed Ontario Online Institute (OOI).

the Internet and capabilities of modern computing technologies.[44] In 2010, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty highlighted the potential success of e-learning as a delivery model. In reference to the proposed Ontario Online Institute, the premier noted that it will bring the "best professors in the top programs at Ontario universities to the homes of those who want to pursue this new option for higher learning" in Ontario and around the world.[45] Many of these programs report very positive educational outcomes, including "improved student engagement; increased educational attainment rates; improved computer skills; improved written communication skills; and enhanced understanding of the subject matter."[46]

The challenges associated with e-learning in the North all stem from a general lack of funding.

However, there are a number of challenges associated with e-learning in the North. These include limited access to broadband infrastructure, computer equipment, technical support persons, and a shortage of teachers who are sufficiently trained in computer-moderated instruction. These challenges all stem from a general lack of funding.[47] Broadband Internet services are becoming more available. In 2002, Industry Canada launched its Broadband for Rural and Northern Development Pilot Program to strengthen First Nations, Northern, and rural communities by improving their access to online health and education services. By 2005, the program extended broadband access to more than 896 rural and remote communities.[48] Many remote Northern Aboriginal communities, however, still have limited access to broadband[49]—possibly due to the shortage of bricks and mortar schools where broadband access is made available.

44   Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of E-learning in Canada*, 92.

45   Eady, *The Ontario Australia Connection*, 6.

46   Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 11.

47   Sisco, *Optimizing the Effectiveness of E-Learning*, 11.

48   Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of E-learning in Canada*, 89.

49   Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 6.

Learning in the Classroom
Source: Sheshatshiu Innu School.

PROVIDING AN ENGAGED-APPROACH TO LEARNING

Education delivery must be engaging to Northerners. This includes the provision of flexible coursework structures, such as block semesters and trimesters, and culturally appropriate pedagogy that embraces holistic and lifelong learning models.[50] Providing an engaged approach to learning acknowledges that ways of knowing and learning vary drastically among cultures, and especially between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. These models ultimately provide the potential mechanisms required to rebuild trust and faith in education as a pathway to success.

Learning about Aboriginal culture and language through informal community-based activities "play[s] an important role in the daily lives of many Aboriginal learners and are commonplace in Aboriginal communities across Canada."[51] According to the CCL's Lifelong Learning Model:

> Aboriginal learning is a highly social process that serves to nurture relationships in the family and throughout the community. These social relationships are a cornerstone for learning about ancestral language, culture, and history . . . [it] . . . also depict[s] the central role that Elders play in the promotion of lifelong learning for Aboriginal people. Elders teach about the importance of responsibility and relationships

within the family and the community; all of which reinforces intergenerational connections and identities.[52]

Indeed, Inuit traditionally learned from their Elders experientially and through oral traditions. Some argue that cultural content loses its meaning and becomes superficial when taught using Western pedagogy:

> Storytelling inside the classroom has quite often been considered as a "boring" job by Elders. The context is wrong. The classroom environment is alien to the way storytelling was practiced in the past. Traditional technical knowledge when taught as part of school subjects is often perceived as folklore . . . . Most of native technical knowledge cannot be taught in the classroom.[53]

Experiential learning is an important way for engaging Northern students. Northern schools facilitate field trips within and outside of the community to places such as courthouses, science laboratories, and farms. The schools also invite guest speakers in diverse fields of work to share their experiences with students. While this can engage Northerners in learning and inspire them to expand their horizons, limited access to funding for such educational delivery remains a barrier. "Informal and experiential learning—including participation in social, cultural, and recreational activities—helps foster a desire to learn among Aboriginal youth while helping with the acquisition of new skills."[54] Post-secondary programs, such as Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning, are also providing important experiential learning opportunities for students. In Northern Manitoba, the Frontier School Division offers an Expanded Options Program (EOP), which gives high school students in distant communities the opportunity to take courses that may not be offered in their community. This program gives the students the chance to explore other career options.[55]

50 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 4.

51 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 5.

52 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 5.

53 Rasmussen, "Qallunology," 91.

54 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 6.

55 Frontier School Division, *Expanded Options Program*.

Family Literacy Day
Source: Sheshatshiu Innu School.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND LOCAL CAPACITY

In addition to not having the local capacity to staff schools, many Northern educational institutions suffer from significant teacher attrition. Some schools in the eastern Arctic, for example, have experienced between a 50 and 100 per cent turnover rate of non-Inuit teachers per year. For a variety of reasons, these Southern hires do not stay long in the North. Often, they find it difficult to adapt to a new culture and the challenging teaching situations in the Northern communities.[56] The high turnover rates and the transiency of teachers impede the formation of the strong and trusting relationships needed to facilitate learning. Northern schools need Northern and Aboriginal teachers; however, the majority of educated Northerners with teaching degrees never set foot in a classroom.[57] Because they have a university degree, they are usually "poached" by territorial, provincial, and First Nations governments, as well as by industry.[58] Currently, there seems to be little incentive for teachers to move from urban areas to Northern school districts. Incentives, such as signing bonuses, moving allowances, professional development funds, and assistance with student loan payments, may help increase the recruitment and retention of educational professionals in the North.[59]

Building a local and sustainable pool of qualified and experienced education professionals and leaders is a key element of ensuring positive educational outcomes in the North. This includes Aboriginal teachers and non-Aboriginal educators who have extensive experience working in Aboriginal communities. There are many Aboriginal communities in the North that control and manage their own schools locally. For example, the Innu community of Sheshatshiu in Labrador has its own school, which developed and implemented a culturally relevant curriculum.[60] (See box "Sheshatshiu Innu School.") In the Frontier School Division in Manitoba, the Program for the Education of Native Teachers (PENT) also helps address the lack of local teachers within the community. Delivered in partnership with Brandon University, the community-based training program encourages members of the community currently working within the schools to work toward their degree in education through work experience.[61]

An example of an effective pre-training program in the North is the Teacher Assistant Career Training Program (TACT) delivered by the Sioux Hudson Literacy Council in partnership with Confederation College and Contact North/Contact Nord. The program provides formal, job-specific training to teachers' assistants in Aboriginal Northern communities, drawing deeply on Aboriginal cultural content and pedagogies. Since 2003, this program has reached out to 14 Aboriginal communities in Northern Ontario.[62]

The Faculty of Education at the University of Regina—with the support of Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU) and the Student Program Centre—also provides assistance to several Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) in the North. Through these partnerships, TEPs are able to "offer university programs with a distinctly Aboriginal

56 Tompkins, *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place*.

57 Poelzer, personal correspondence, December 19, 2011.

58 Poelzer, personal correspondence, December 19, 2011.

59 Kitchenham and Chasteauneuf, "Teacher Supply and Demand," 890–91.

60 Sheshatshiu Innu School, "About Us—Mission Statement." A complete list of band-operated schools is available from Indian and Northern Affairs at this address: www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/acp/site.nsf/vDownload/schools/$file/ACP_BAND_OPERATED_SCHOOLS_2009_EN.pdf.

61 Frontier School Division, *Program for the Education of Native Teachers*.

62 Sioux Hudson Literacy Council, "Projects and Partnerships"; Ontario Literacy Coalition, "Welcome to the Future of Literacy."

focus, in accessible [Northern] locations."[63] The programs integrate Indigenous cultures and languages and are providing an important solution to the high teacher-turnover rates in the North. Building this local Northern capacity in education is bringing consistency and stability, and is providing important role models to students.[64]

In 2009, the first 23 Inuit finished a three-year Master of Education program, delivered primarily in Nunavut; a second group should complete degrees in 2013.

The Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) is a teaching program offered in La Ronge, Saskatchewan, in partnership with the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. Through the program, Northerners, particularly those fluent in an Aboriginal language, can earn their teacher certification. Since its inception, the NORTEP program has increased the number of Northern Aboriginal teachers.[65] Similarly, the Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP), offered in partnership with the University of Regina, helps provide opportunities for Inuit to become teachers in Nunavut. The program provides both on-campus and community-based programming and incorporates field experiences through an extended practicum and internship program. NTEP also allows students to complete their coursework partly in their home communities and partly in Iqaluit. A partnership between Yukon College and the University of Regina, the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP) has also opened the door for Northern Aboriginal students to earn a bachelor of education degree and become certified to teach in both Yukon and Saskatchewan.[66] And Aurora College, together with the University of Saskatchewan, offers a bachelor of education program that includes an Aboriginal and Northern culture-based approach designed for the needs of N.W.T. schools and students.

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63 Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, "Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs."

64 Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, "Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs."

65 Northern Teacher Education Program, "NORTEP Success Story."

66 University of Regina, "Affiliated Programs."

Sheshatshiu Innu School

Sheshatshiu Innu School is located in Sheshatshiu, Newfoundland and Labrador. The state-of-the-art facility was opened in 2009 and has provided young Innu students in the community with new opportunities for learning. Its mission is to provide ". . . a quality education that meets the individual and collective needs and vision of our students, in a manner that respects and honours . . . Innu culture, language, values, and traditions, and prepares them to be proud contributing members of . . . [their] . . . communities and the broader society."[1]

Located in the heart of the community, it is rooted in Innu-focused education.[2] As part of the community's desire to manage its own education system, the Mamu Tshishkutamashutau/Innu Education school board was created. It serves as a unique example in Aboriginal education, as it is one of the only independent school boards in Canada.

Although Sheshatshiu Innu School officially uses the provincial curriculum, it incorporates the traditional language (Innu-aimun) as well as traditional values and beliefs (Innu-eitun) whenever possible. Cultural activities and visits from local Elders are important components of these teachings. The school strives to involve parents and the community to enable student success.[3] Equipping classrooms with new technologies, such as interactive white boards and new laptop computers, empowers students with tools that facilitate learning, while allowing them to remain connected to their culture.[4]

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1 Sheshatshiu Innu School, "About Us—Mission Statement."

2 Sheshatshiu Innu School, "About Us—Mission Statement."

3 Mamu Tshishkutamashutau/Innu Education, *Annual Report 2009–2010*.

4 Mamu Tshishkutamashutau/Innu Education, *Annual Report 2009–2010*.

Furthermore, the University of Prince Edward Island, in conjunction with Nunavut Arctic College, the Government of Nunavut, and St. Francis Xavier University, offers a Master of Education program. In 2009, the first 23 Inuit graduates finished this three-year program, delivered primarily in Nunavut. A second group of Inuit students is expected to complete degrees in 2013.[67]

Building pathways to post-secondary education and employment also depends on the accessibility of local role models in Northern communities. In many communities, residents have not completed post-secondary schooling (and sometimes high school), yet their lifestyle may seem "good enough." Programs such as DreamCatcher Mentoring (DCM) connect high school

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67 University of Prince Edward Island, "Nunavut Master of Education."

students with role models in their career fields of choice and outside of their communities, by Internet, while empowering them to remain in school. Today, the program has connected over 600 students in Yukon and Nunavut with Canadian mentors in their field of interest.[68] Launched as a pilot project in 2005, "DCM provides an opportunity to interact with a professional working in their aspired career that they would otherwise never have the chance to communicate with, especially for students living in rural communities."[69] Youth are empowered to work toward setting and attaining their goals, while gaining confidence in their abilities. DCM has been successful in enhancing student engagement, retention, and attainment: 94 per cent of students who have participated in the program have graduated or still remain in school.[70]

Talent retention is a challenge in many Northern communities where students leave to pursue educational and employment opportunities without returning.

Effective educational programming, delivery, and design in the North require the support of leadership. Talent retention and leadership is a challenge in many Northern communities where students leave to pursue educational and employment opportunities without returning. Leadership is important at the community level, but also within school boards, as well as for Aboriginal communities and local leadership, such as chiefs and council. To support the growth and retention of local leadership, the Yukon Department of Education, for example, has partnered with Yukon College and the University of Northern British Columbia to offer a master's program in Educational Leadership. This program provides the opportunity for Yukon educators and administrators to earn a high level of post-secondary qualification, and undoubtedly, develop skills to put into practice within their home communities.[71]

E-Learning, At School and After School
Source: DreamCatcher Youth Mentoring Society.

SCHOOLS AS HUBS

Increasingly, schools in Northern communities are becoming hubs for services beyond learning. They are being used as centres for the integration of community services such as daycare, recreational, and cultural activities. This is not only helping to reduce an infrastructure deficit, it is also helping to break down barriers between education and community development in the North.

Programs such as the Northern Community & School Recreation Coordinator Program (NC&SRC) in Northern Saskatchewan, for example, have been instrumental in connecting the community to the school. It receives direction from a local steering committee, which comprises local community members. The program employs community and school recreation coordinators, who are tasked with the coordination of sport, culture, and recreation programming at schools and for the wider community.[72] The NC&SRC program provides opportunities for the school to be open and accessible for the entire community, becoming a hub of activity. The program is helping build local capacity, while making the school accessible not only to students, but to parents and the community in general.[73]

68 DreamCatcher Mentoring, "Program Overview."

69 DreamCatcher Mentoring, *What Is DreamCatcher Mentoring?*

70 DreamCatcher Mentoring, *What Is DreamCatcher Mentoring?*

71 University of Northern British Columbia and Yukon College, *Masters of Education Program.*

72 Northern Sport, Culture and Recreation District, "Northern Community & School."

73 Duncombe, interview, March 2, 2011.

Moreover, using the local school as a hub for the integration of community services has helped some Northern communities improve educational and social outcomes. School-based programs, such as the Shared Care Daycare in Nunavut, have helped young mothers complete their high school diplomas while sharing child-minding services with other young mothers.[74] In Arviat, the Small Steps program provides services that range from parenting preparation classes through to family services, pre-school, and early intervention programs.[75] Other schools have started to provide snacks and meals to students at school to ensure students have healthy food that they may not otherwise have access to, which also helps students perform better in school.[76]

Schools have also become cultural hubs for Aboriginal students to gain a stronger sense of identity and being. Language plays a particularly important role: " . . . through language, Aboriginal Peoples transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another and make sense of their shared experience."[77] Immersion programs offered at schools like Kihew Waciston Cree Immersion School in Onion Lake, Northern Saskatchewan, are offering students the opportunity to reconnect with their Aboriginal language and traditional teachings.[78]

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are an essential element for achieving educational success in the North. Northern geography, small community size, and limited financial resources drive the need for these partnerships, which occur at many levels in the North. The partnership between educational institutions and their associative communities is one of the most essential. Educational content and delivery has to be attuned to the community's needs and useful for community members. To make this connection, commun-

ities, schools, government, and local business leaders need to have an ongoing dialogue—and this dialogue needs to engage the children and youth in a meaningful and authentic way. Collaborative leadership is essential.

Partnerships are also at the core of many Northern post-secondary institutes. These partnerships have been instrumental in expanding access to learning and training opportunities to students in underserved communities. This has allowed many students to remain at home while pursuing advanced learning. The partnerships have also been instrumental for research and innovation. Two Conference Board reports, *Innovation Catalysts and Accelerators: The Impact of Ontario* (2010) and *Applied Innovation: Next Steps for Colleges* (2011), position Northern Ontario as a hotbed for applied research collaborations between colleges and businesses that will stimulate innovation and contribute to long-term local economic and social development.[79] For example, since 2001, "FedNor has provided about $13 million in funding for more than 70 projects conducted with Northern Ontario colleges."[80]

Educational partnerships have been instrumental in expanding access to learning and training opportunities to students in underserved communities.

The University of Saskatchewan's International Centre for Northern Governance and Development is a strong example of a partnership program that brings together industry, government, and professionalized learning. The Master of Northern Governance and Development (MNGD), introduced in 2010, is developing cohorts of highly networked Northern professionals through innovative distance education. This format allows Northern students to remain in their Northern communities while they study, and after graduation when they join the workforce. The program receives major external funding from industry agents such as Cameco Corporation, the Government of Saskatchewan, and First Nations

74 Anonymous interviewee, interview, January 14, 2011.

75 Tagataga Inc., *Inuit Early Childhood Education and Care*, 28.

76 Anonymous interviewee, interview, January 10, 2011.

77 Canadian Council on Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada*, 25.

78 Anonymous interviewee, interview, January 10, 2011.

79 Munro and Stuckey, *Applied Innovation: Next Steps for Colleges*, ii.

80 Munro and Haimowitz, *Innovation Catalysts and Accelerators*, 34.

governments. Two innovative aspects of the program that prepare Northern students for the economy of the 21st century are the industry internship program and the international field school in Norway and Sweden.[81]

Some partnerships are very new, while others are more established and have reported outcomes.

In some cases collaborations happen between Northern institutes, while in others it involves a joint effort between the North and South. There are a vast number of educational partnerships in the North—some are very new, while some are more established and have reported outcomes. These partnerships highlight the importance of the connections to improving access to post-secondary programs, and ensuring that the programs offered are suited to student and community needs and interests. Portage College, for example, is focusing on bringing learning to the learners and does this by operating through 10 campuses throughout Northern Alberta. The College has partnered with local K-12 schools to improve retention and graduation rates and is focused on helping students succeed at college. The efforts are paying off in increased graduation rates from its programs.[82]

Northern youth need to be engaged at a young age to understand the educational opportunities that are possible in their communities and beyond. In Grand Prairie, Alberta, the Grand Prairie Regional College has been working at creating a new awareness of post-secondary education and building community pride in education and learning. Partnerships with Alberta universities have meant that several degrees can be completed at the Grand Prairie campus. And it is thinking boldly about ways to bridge the transition between high school and post-secondary schooling; even considering a future where a high school is co-located on the college campus.[83] Similarly, the University College of the North (UNC), in Northern Manitoba, has partnered with

Career Trek, a non-profit organization, to launch the NOR-MAN region project in The Pas. This initiative recently brought Grade 6 students from Northern communities to UNC in order to experience a range of career opportunities. The initiative is a win-win, helping students see first-hand the value of a formal education, and helping communities and the business sector build the success factors necessary for engaged citizens and a skilled workforce of the future.[84]

Ensuring that the students in the North have access to the right courses required for post-secondary or trades-based training is a significant challenge. For example, schools that offer math and science courses may not be able to afford or attract teachers who specialize in these course subjects. Students are then taught by non-experts, which, in turn, may have a negative effect on the quality of math and science education they receive.[85] Providing post-secondary science-based options for Northern students is also a significant challenge. Partnerships are helping to break through these barriers. Northlands College and the University of Saskatchewan, for example, are developing a program to support students in Northern Saskatchewan to complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing within their home community. The program is to be offered at Northlands College, an institution that serves the northern half of the province. The program is focused on providing options for Northern Aboriginal students to become future health professionals within Northern communities.[86] Similarly, Nunavut Arctic College and Dalhousie University are collaborating to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing that focuses on the specific challenges of nursing in Nunavut. The program is designed to prepare nurses to take a leadership role in the territory's health care system. In September 2011, the college began to offer a midwifery education program in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services.[87]

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81 University of Saskatchewan, International Centre for Northern Governance and Development (ICNGD), "About ICNGD"; Poelzer, personal correspondence, December 19, 2011.

82 Anonymous interviewee, interview, February 25, 2011.

83 Wood, "College Looking Toward Long-Term Plan."

84 University College of the North, *Career Trek Launches*.

85 Martin, *Building Labour Force Capacity*.

86 Northlands College, *Degree Nursing in Northern Saskatchewan*.

87 Dalhousie University and Nunavut Arctic College, "BScN (Arctic Nursing)"; Nunavut Arctic College, "Midwifery."

What Still Needs to Be Done? Lessons Learned

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Chapter Summary

◆ Cutting-edge practices are emerging from the North to address some of the barriers to the design and delivery of effective educational programming.

◆ Findings suggest five specific policy-oriented recommendations that could support positive educational outcomes in the North.

◆ These recommendations include pursuing an integrated approach, providing continued educational support for Northern Aboriginal communities, providing accessible pathways to post-secondary education, strengthening local pools of education professionals, and ensuring continued access to schools and innovative educational programming.

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By many measures, Canada is a world leader in educational outcomes—delivering high-quality education with comparatively modest spending.[1] The public system generally provides a good quality education and high school graduation rates have improved over time. For Canadian communities this bodes well— education is critical to individual and community prosperity and well-being. But when Canada's North is

compared to the South on common measures of educational outputs, the picture is not as bright. Despite the fact that many Northern communities exhibit positive educational outcomes, educational attainment in the North is generally not on par with the South.

Programs are working hard to overcome the challenges of infrastructural capacity, geographic remoteness, and the historical legacies of colonialism in the North.

At the same time, cutting-edge practices are emerging from the North to address some of the various barriers to the design and delivery of educational programming. Educational content is being designed that is responsive to the unique and varied needs of Northerners. This is providing important opportunities for building pathways to positive educational outcomes and economic success. These programs are working hard to overcome the challenges of infrastructural capacity, geographic remoteness, and the historical legacies of colonialism in the North. They are achieving success by delivering educational content through learner-centred models with a significant technological component, and by engaging models that provide flexibility and respect for cultural inclusivity. Emerging from these innovative practices is the centrality of schools functioning as hubs within communities. This is helping to reduce an infrastructure deficit by providing space for other social and cultural programming. It is also helping to break down barriers between education

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1 The Conference Board of Canada, "Education and Skills," 1.

and community development by increasing community members' exposure to schools as a space for positive, personal growth and success.

Developing local and sustainable capacity and leadership in education continues to be a key challenge in the North. Partnerships are connecting communities, schools, government, and local business leaders in the design and delivery of mentoring and training programs. Greater incentives for Southern-trained educators to stay in the North and continued investment in supporting and encouraging the growth of local talent and leadership are a necessity.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Overcrowded homes, high crime rates, and high proportions of single-parent families are significant barriers to achieving positive educational outcomes in the North. Furthermore, limited access to educational resources (low income and economic diversity in the case of tertiary education) is proving to be a considerable challenge to educational attainment. It is also clear that educational outcomes tend to be poorer where the proportion of Aboriginal population is higher. This result can be explained by the prevalence of social and access-related challenges in the Aboriginal population, as well as additional challenges related to the design and delivery of culturally appropriate and engaging educational programming.

It is very clear that an *integrated approach* is needed to continue to support and enhance educational outcomes in the North: psychological well-being is related to socio-economic well-being and safety; preparedness to learn is related to community and family support; and ongoing assessments of educational programming and delivery are related to access to education that is responsive to community and cultural needs. This type of integrated approach to education requires directing policy development toward, for example, improving housing conditions, providing support for single-parent families, and preventing crime. Educators need to continue to provide mentoring and positive role models for students and encourage parents to be engaged and involved in their

children's learning. And schools need to be supported as they continue to grow into their hybrid role as community hubs—providing a safe and positive learning environment along with resources and support such as nutritious meals; and social programming, such as daycare and assistance with homework.

Innovative programs and policies are being implemented in a number of Northern Aboriginal communities. The challenge is to ensure that successful models are shared and, when appropriate, implemented more broadly.

Providing *continued educational support for Northern Aboriginal communities* must be a priority; supporting and enhancing the educational attainment and success of Aboriginal youth is crucial. Support must include specific programs and policies that address the unique cultural and language needs of Aboriginal youth, and opportunities that encourage collective healing from the various impacts of the colonial legacy. Engaging Aboriginal youth also requires continued investment in innovative delivery models that are learner-centred and provide flexibility and respect for cultural inclusivity. Moving from priorities to strategies to action is a perpetual challenge. This report has shown that innovative programs and policies are being implemented in a number of Northern Aboriginal communities. The challenge is to ensure that successful models are shared and, when appropriate, implemented more broadly.

Creating *accessible pathways to post-secondary education* requires early and ongoing investment. Northern youth need to be exposed to educational options from an early age. This requires the design and delivery of programs that make the strong link between educational outcomes and economic success. Continued support for career preparation programs, pre-training and up-skilling educational programs, adult learning centres, and gap transition programs is also needed to encourage students, old and young, to consider their educational options, including college or trade school programs. Educational institutions and governing bodies also need to improve their communication and coordination to support the positive transition of students between secondary and tertiary education programs. Finally, increased funding is also

required to support pathways to post-secondary studies in communities where low income is a demonstrated barrier in access to higher education.

Building stronger pools of *experienced local education professionals* is a key element of ensuring positive educational outcomes in the North. The development of strong and innovative recruitment and retention strategies is required to attract Aboriginal teachers and non-Aboriginal educators who have extensive experience teaching in a Northern context. Greater incentives, such as signing bonuses, moving allowances, professional development funds, and assistance with student loan payments, may help to increase the recruitment and retention of these educational professionals in the North.

Improving the infrastructural capacity of Northern communities is required to provide *continued access to schools and innovative educational programming.* This includes programs that support the improvement of broadband infrastructure, the funds required to upgrade and maintain equipment, and the staff to provide technical assistance. Policies and funding are also required to nurture the partnerships that connect Northern schools with educational institutions and resources in the South, and to expand these partnerships to include the corporate private sector. Such partnerships are proving effective in increasing access to educational resources and expertise in the North.

APPENDIX A

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Interview Guide and Interviewee Breakdown

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant Information

Name:

Position:

Organization:

Region:

OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

The objectives of the interview are to gather the participant's insights and expertise on the state of education, current and past programs, and the effectiveness of these programs. The approach taken to education is three-pronged: it encompasses not only traditional educational outcomes (such as graduation rates, etc.) but also community-based learning, as well as training and development. Other objectives include assisting the project team in:

- developing a definition for educational success;
- identifying the factors that are important to educational success in the North;
- featuring examples of communities that are faring well in this regard; and
- providing some recommendations in the form of best practices or other tools designed to assist the reader in addressing common challenges to positive education outcomes in Northern communities.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All statements made will be non-attributable unless at the discrete request of the interview participant.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How important do you think education is to community well-being in your region?
   a. Why do you think it's important?
2. What are some common challenges that communities in your region face in terms of education?
3. What are some education models and approaches that have been used in the past in your region?
   a. How effective have they been? Why do you think they were/weren't effective?
4. What are some education models and approaches that are used in your region?
   a. How effective are they?
   b. Why do you think they are/aren't effective?
5. How do you think educational success should be defined?
   a. How can this be measured?
   b. What are some indicators?
6. What resources are required to enable educational success in communities in your region?
   a. Are these resources available in most communities?
   b. Are there any that are lacking?
   c. If so, which ones? (Are there enough teachers? Schools? Capacity for e-learning, etc.?)
7. Which factors hinder educational success in your region?
8. Are there any communities that are faring especially well in this regard (success stories)?
   a. If so, which ones?
   b. What is it about these communities that make them exceptional in this regard (measures and determinants)?
   c. What do you think contributed to educational success in these communities?

INTERVIEWEE BREAKDOWN

Interviewees have been selected to ensure that all regions covered by the Centre for the North are represented.

Breakdown of Interviewees by Sector

Not-for profit advocacy	3
Consultant	1
Educators	2
Government/policy-makers	2
Administrators*	5

*Many administrators interviewed had also previously worked as educators.

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255 Smyth Road, Ottawa ON K1H 8M7 Canada
Tel. 613-526-3280 • *Fax* 613-526-4857 • *Inquiries* 1-866-711-2262

The Conference Board, Inc. 845 Third Avenue, New York NY 10022-6679 USA *Tel.* 212-759-0900 • *Fax* 212-980-7014 • www.conference-board.org
The Conference Board Europe Chaussée de La Hulpe 130, Box 11, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium *Tel.* +32 2 675 54 05 • *Fax* +32 2 675 03 95
The Conference Board Asia-Pacific 2802 Admiralty Centre, Tower 1, 18 Harcourt Road, Admiralty Hong Kong SAR *Tel.* +852 2511 1630 • *Fax* +852 2869 1403

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