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LESSONS FROM ONTARIO: AN ANALYSIS OF INDIGENOUS POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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This report explores post-secondary education's role in indigenous development, particularly focusing on successes of and recommendations for the province of Ontario.

The following questions guide our analysis of each topic of interest:

- *What has been done to better serve indigenous groups, and how has that program or initiative had an impact?*

- *What gaps remain?*

- *Are there successful models in other provinces or in the United States of America that might be applied to Ontario's unique challenges, and if so, how?*

To answer these questions, we spoke with various stakeholders both in the communities and external, including, Chiefs and Council members, Program Administrators, Education Authorities, Band Managers, college and university officials, Indigenous Students, Instructors and service providers throughout the province of Ontario. We also included research from external parties to provide context about what is going on in other provinces and across the border.

Disclaimer: When one examines the extensive history of colonization in contexts such as Canada and the United States, terminology is a controversial topic. Categorizing distinct tribes under one term is problematic and can be viewed as disrespectful. In order to address the numerous disparities that exist, this paper uses the term "indigenous" in reference to First Nation, Metis and Inuit people. According to Dictionary.com, indigenous is defined as "originating in and characteristic of a particular region or country." Other terminology may be used in order to respect the referenced works, such as: Aboriginal; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN); and Native American.

CONTEXT

In order to understand post-secondary education today, it is important to provide the historical context and its continued impact on indigenous communities.

Historical Perspectives

The history of colonization is well documented in Canada and the United States, however, broad understanding of the impact of that history on indigenous peoples is still not yet widely known, especially in regards to education. This briefing comes on the heels of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on Canada's Indian residential school system noting the impact on over 150,000 indigenous children and their families that also led to the death of over 6,000 children.

Government-sanctioned residential schools were first established and in operation in 1883 and continued well into the closing decades of the 1900s (Hanson, 2009). Time spent in residential schools was horrific for many indigenous children – including extreme emotional and physical abuse and poor living conditions. Duncan Campbell Scott, whom functioned in the capacity of Deputy Superintendent General, Indian Affairs, in 1913 wrote "It is quite within the mark to say that 50 percent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education, which they had received therein." Residential schools removed indigenous children from the influence of their homes and families and sought to strip them of their traditions and cultures and assimilate them into Eurocentric/Christian civilization (Hanson, 2009).

For the children that made it out of the school system, skepticism of Western education followed, not only in their lives but the lives of their children. In 2013, 57% of First Nations respondents reported that they "do not trust the education system" despite being current or graduated post-secondary students, and these numbers are even higher among the out-of-school population (Restoule et al).

Residential schools continue to have intergenerational societal impacts of great extent, such as addictions, mental health issues and varying abuses. As indigenous people sought to escape the emotional tragedies they had suffered, many turned toward drugs and alcohol. In a case review of First Nations residential school survivors, more than 82% reported substance abuse after attending residential schools (Corrado and Cohen, 2003).

Indigenous peoples have lost a great deal of their cultures, which continues to be a challenge to this day. As generations of indigenous people have grown up without learning their native tongue, the number of indigenous languages has dwindled. From 1951 to 1981, the percentage of Aboriginal people speaking their Native mother tongue declined from 87.4% to 29.3% (Burnaby, 1996). Many indigenous ways of knowing and learning remain overlooked and overshadowed by the Western education systems of today. While the number of indigenous instructors is increasing, there is still much to be done in order to preserve indigenous cultures and traditions and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing and learning into the classroom.

Current Context

Today, the indigenous populations of Canada and the United States face significant challenges, with some communities facing living conditions compared to that, as some would say, of "third-world" countries. More than two-thirds of all First Nation communities in Canada have been under a water advisory at some time in the past decade (Levasseur & Marcoux, 2015). In many communities, threats such as flooding have rendered buildings uninhabitable and caused issues of overcrowding in many homes. Moreover, 51% of First Nations children live in poverty, rising to 60% on reserve (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was a requirement put in place in 2007 as a result of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement reached in 2007, the largest class action settlement in Canadian history. The TRC report signals a path forward towards reconciliation and healing. The report outlines 94 recommendations, of which, seven directly fall under education, however it should be noted that many more of the 94 recommendations, education will play a key role.

Recent Partnership Developments

Promising development projects are underway, driven by industries on or near indigenous lands. First Nations communities have begun requiring three key agreements from resource companies: shared revenue, minimal environmental impacts, and perhaps most importantly, guaranteed hiring preference for First Nation members. These requirements are set forth in formal contracts known as Impact Benefit Agreements (IBA), which outline the impacts of the project, the commitment and responsibilities of both parties, and how the associated Indigenous community will share in benefits of the operation through employment and economic development.[1] As these new projects take hold, there is a large need for (and a growing shortage of) skilled labour, and many mining companies are looking toward First Nations for future manpower (Gillis, 2015). However, many indigenous people lack the necessary employment skills desired by employers, or when they do seek training for those skills, lack the necessary academic and literacy skills. Therefore, many First Nation communities may miss out on these economic opportunities if post-secondary demands are not met.

DISCUSSION

After thoughtful examination of post-secondary education in Ontario, we focused on six main categories: *post-secondary education funding, information sharing and collaboration, inclusivity in mainstream institutions, indigenous serving institutions, local training and work placement,* and *online and distance learning.* With each category, we analyzed successes happening in Ontario and determined recommendations for each area going forward.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING

A constant barrier for most disadvantaged groups is lack of financial resources. Pursuing a post-secondary degree, diploma, or certification can be particularly costly. When one considers that some First Nations communities experience income assistance dependency levels in excess of 80%, these costs are further amplified, as people must worry about providing food and shelter for themselves and their families and do not have the extra money to spend on education (ONWAA, 2011).

A negative impact was introduced by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada with the implementation of a 2% national funding formula education cap; despite a steady growth of inflation and First Nation population requiring an average annual increase of 6.3% since 1996 for First Nations education. In contrast, funding increases from provincial and territorial school systems averaged 4.1% per year, despite a steady decline in enrolment, only warranting a 3.2% average annual increase (Assembly of First Nations Fact Sheet First Nations Education Funding). It is not unreasonable to consider the impact of substandard funding for on reserve

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1 Read more on Impact Benefit Agreements at: http://www.miningfacts.org/Communities/What-are-Impact-and-Benefit-Agreements-(IBAs)/

schools and how it contributes to drop out rates in high school.

Successes

Despite having seen an increase in the past two decades, post-secondary education costs in Canada remain considerably lower than those in the United States. According to the OECD's *Education at a Glance 2015* report, the average tuition costs at a public institution in Canada is nearly *half* of the average tuition cost of a public institution in the United States.

Coupled with the lower costs of education, Canada's federal government provides more funding opportunities for indigenous students than in the United States, where students tend to rely on private scholarships, institutional grants, and individual loans. In 2013-2014, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) invested more than $322 million in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), supporting more than 22,000 students.[2]

Ontario's provincial government also creates many funding opportunities for indigenous learners, providing $1.5 million in annual funding through the Aboriginal Student Bursary Fund and investing an additional $1.5 million to support Indspire's Building Brighter Futures Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards program (Di Costanzo, 2015). Indspire plays a leading role as the largest funder of indigenous education, outside of the federal government, awarding more than $87 million since 2004.[3] However, the biggest provincial funding news came in early 2016, when it was announced that "college students whose family income is less than $50,000 a year will receive grants large enough to cover their whole tuition" (Chiose, 2016). Numerous scholarships, grants, and bursaries lend additional support throughout Canada, usually coming from private entities, and often found on websites such as the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society (AMMSA).[4]

Recommendations

1. **Increase funding for Ontario Works programs.** The primary objective of Ontario Works employment assistance is to provide support to people so that they may enter/re-enter the work force (ONWAA, 2011). However, as Ontario Works seeks to increase each person's employability, there are many more barriers than meets the eye. As mentioned before, drug addiction is a challenge for many First Nation communities and detracts many people from pursuing post-secondary education or training. Out of 47 First Nation communities providing full Ontario Works, only 10 were provided with the Addiction Services Initiative (ONWAA, 2011). Many people on Ontario Works are also supporting children, which may require their attention and prevent them from pursuing a post-secondary education. Out of 111 Ontario Works delivery communities, only 55 offered daycare centres (ONWAA, 2011). More funding is needed to expand these programs, especially to centres located in indigenous communities.

2. **Expand funding opportunities for adults seeking to return to school.** Whether the opportunities are connected with Ontario Works or operate out of a separate fund, it is essential to provide pathways for adult learners to return to education. Most reserves have priorities for post-secondary funding: firstly, recent high school graduates; secondly, students continuing their undergraduate studies; thirdly, Masters students, and; finally, learners who have been out of school for a while (Monkman, 2016). Funds are often gone by the time they reach the adult learners trying to get back into school.

2 Read more on PSSSP at: https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/110010000336 83

3 Read more on Indspire at: http://indspire.ca/about-indspire/

4 Read more on AMMSA at: http://www.ammsa.com/community-access/scholarships/

Additionally, as many funding opportunities stipulate full-time status in order to receive funding, many adult learners are unable to receive funding as they are only able to attend part-time.

3. **Ensure funding reaches indigenous communities in a timely manner.** In visits with various community leaders, we heard many stories of funding that was promised but never made it to the community. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently promised $8.4 billion to indigenous development, however, most of the money is back-ended with the largest year coming after the next election, which many fear will be cut when the time comes (Kirkup, 2016). These fears are reasonable given the history. In 2000, the school in Attawapiskat was evacuated due to contamination, and the government responded with portable buildings to act as "temporary" classrooms and promised to build a new school (Angus, 2015). However, more than 8 years later, children were still attending school in portable buildings (Angus, 2015). And in 2008, Shannen Koostachin, a 13-year-old girl from Attawapiskat, became widely known in a national and international movement for indigenous rights – a movement that continues today through Shannen's Dream. Shannen dreamed of "safe and comfy schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth," and although she passed away before she could see her dream come to fruition, her efforts brought a new school to her home community of Attawapiskat in 2012, the year she would have graduated.[5]

INFORMATION SHARING AND COLLABORATION

Over the past decade, many institutions and organizations have expanded their efforts and increased their resources in regards to indigenous development. As many of these organizations overlap in their efforts, this section reviews the successes of some of these partnerships and recommends areas for more sharing and collaboration to happen.

Successes

Many colleges and universities have developed post-secondary programs in partnership with Indigenous people. This June marked the first graduation of the University of Sudbury's Indigenous Studies program in the James Bay Coastal communities. Launched in 2013, the program was spearheaded by indigenous community members, including some instructors that had been working at the university and seeking to bring education back to their community for years. The first class of students consisted of 4 women, and the program has since doubled in size with 8 students expected to graduate in 2017 and 14 students expected to graduate in 2018. Graduates shared that having education made available in their communities allowed them to balance their home-life commitments; many had families and were also working. Flexible programming was all noted as a huge benefit to students as it was considerate of the numerous other community events occurring, winter roads, traditional and cultural events and allowed students to make up the time as needed by allowing a flexible schedule of programming. The greatest advantage shared by the students was that the curriculum was relevant to their local community, focusing on their history and their traditions. This is just one example of many colleges and universities partnering with First Nation communities to expand education for indigenous peoples.
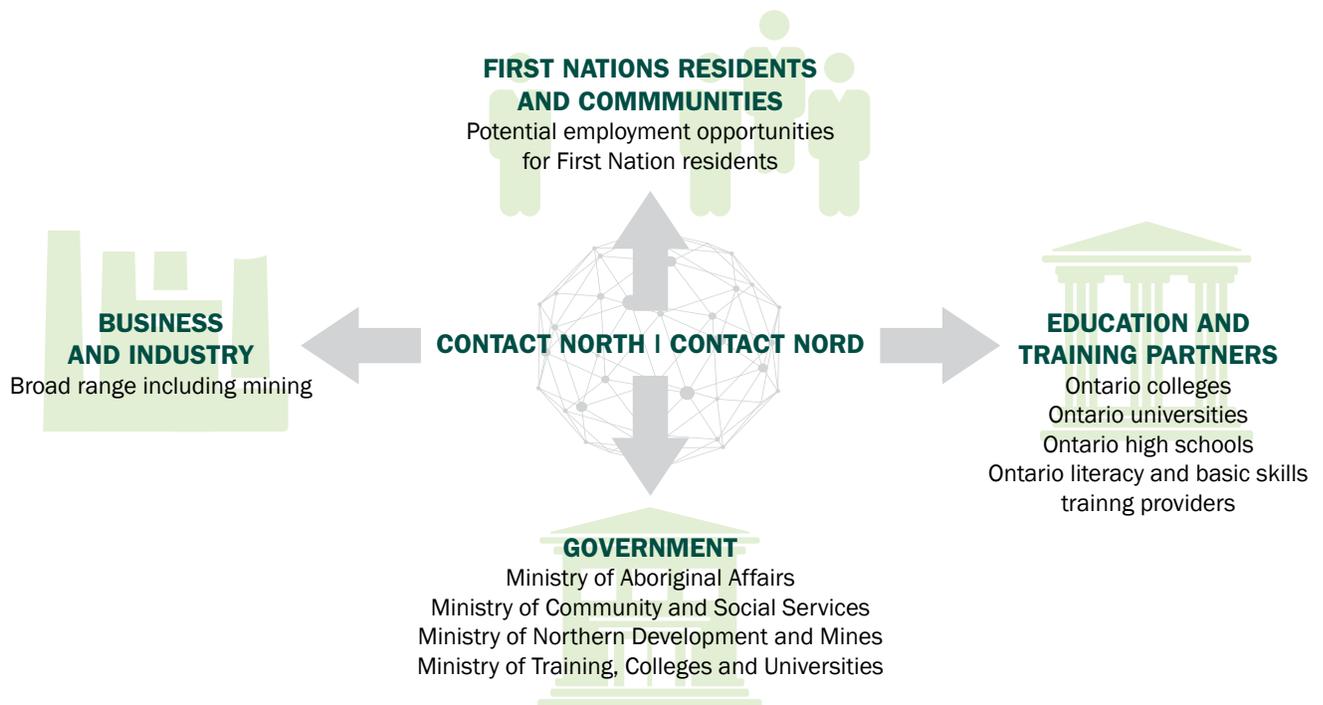
In 2016, First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) partnered with Algonquin College released the first and only online training course for OCAP®. OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) is a set of standards of how

5 Read more on Shannen's Dream at: https://fncaringsociety.com/shannens-dream

First Nations data can be collected, protected, used, and shared.[6] This partnership goes a long way for not only training and education purposes but also in terms of data transparency. If an organization is not tracking indigenous development, there is a lack of accountability. At both a provincial and federal level, it is vital to know what programs are having success and to respect indigenous rights while doing so. There has been much controversy about sharing of information by Indigenous people. These challenges include the lack of a centralized system across Canada and provincially.

Contact North | Contact Nord sits on the axis of many stakeholders, including but not limited to: institutions providing education and training, employers seeking to upgrade their labour force, organizations that fund indigenous development initiatives, and the indigenous communities that seek post-secondary opportunities for their members. Through its 112 learning centres and operations that reach more than 600 communities across Ontario, Contact North | Contact Nord takes a valuable *on-the-ground approach* that allows for each learning centre to truly become a part of the communities it supports. In this unique position, much time is spent building connections between different stakeholders. Members of the community know where to go in order to seek out post-secondary education options and access as well as employment and other personal development opportunities, and institutional partners and employers now have a valuable bridge into the community.

FIRST NATIONS RESIDENTS AND COMMMUNITIES
Potential employment opportunities for First Nation residents

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY
Broad range including mining

CONTACT NORTH | CONTACT NORD

EDUCATION AND TRAINING PARTNERS
Ontario colleges
Ontario universities
Ontario high schools
Ontario literacy and basic skills trainng providers

GOVERNMENT
Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs
Ministry of Community and Social Services
Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

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6 Read more on OCAP® at: http://fnigc.ca/ocap.html

Recommendations

1. **Implement an institutional database that is open to the public.** Speaking strictly to post-secondary institutions, if one wanted to know if an institution was improving their efforts to reach indigenous learners, there would not be a sure-fire way for this to be investigated. In the United States, there is – and it's called the Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Through IPEDS, one may track the year-to-year progress of any college, university, or vocational/technical institution in the U.S., which is particularly powerful for demographic-related transparency. If one wanted to know the retention rate for indigenous males vs non-indigenous males, IPEDS allows for that information to be found. If an institution wanted to improve their efforts in retaining indigenous learners, they may look to this database to see which institutions are doing it well and share best practices. Ultimately, this database is important for information sharing purposes, and it would fall on a larger entity to implement (such as the Ontario provincial or Canada federal government) as it would require consistency across reports and connections to institutions throughout the province (or the country).

2. **Increase opportunities post-graduation.** Post-secondary education only goes so far, as employment opportunities are often limited on reservations. Post-secondary institutes need to partner with employers to understand how they might direct students toward them post-graduation. There is also much room to expand entrepreneurship opportunities within these communities, similar to the Martin Aboriginal Educational Initiative, which not only provides the necessary skills and training but offers a stipend at the end of the program for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to pursue their own ventures and connections to investors to further growth.[7]

3. **Increase funding for rural, remote, First Nations communities.** While our funding section does discuss increasing funding for post-secondary education, this funding recommendation is to build necessary connections. Due to infrastructure restrictions, it is often a challenge to retain a learning centre (such as for the purposes of Contact North | Contact Nord) in various fly-in communities. Additionally, travel to these communities can be expensive. However, building these connections is as important as ever, and getting into the community is essential to creating opportunities for indigenous people to fully participate in the 21st century.

INCLUSIVITY IN MAINSTREAM INSTITUTIONS

While there are many barriers to getting indigenous learners into the classroom (financial, academic, etc.), there are also many barriers to retention. Many students face culture shock and/or homesickness when they move away from their home community to attend college or university, which often leads to them dropping out and not finishing their program. Ensuring students are welcomed and included at their institution is vital to their success.

Successes

Since the launch of the *Ontario Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training Framework* in 2011, every publicly funded college and university in Ontario has established an Aboriginal Education Council.[8] Colleges and universities throughout the province also maintain cultural centres designated for First Nations, Métis,

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7 Read more on the initiative at: http://www.maei-ieam.ca/
8 Read more on the framework at: http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/APETPFramework.pdf

and Inuit students and their families. The centres are driven by the provincial government, receiving funding for their operations through the Post-secondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners (PEFAL). These centres provide necessary support systems and encouraging environments for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in their progression from secondary to post-secondary learning.[9] When a student is supported and feels welcome at an institution, they are more likely to complete their course of studies.

Recommendations

1. **Establish indigenous in-house programs at colleges and universities.** In 2013, upwards of 80% of First Nations students reported stress at their new programs and 71% reported difficulty moving away from family (Restoule et al). In-house programs (known by various names depending on the institution) are initiatives that designate a specific housing option for indigenous students and provide additional resources as deemed conducive to indigenous living. These programs allow indigenous students to live and learn together while continuing their tribal traditions away from home. O'odham Ki at the University of Arizona is one example of a residential program that affirms Native American cultural identity in a variety of ways, including in-house smudging ceremonies to welcome students at the beginning of the year and annual pow wow events.[10] These programs have been shown to increase student retention and graduation rates, which may not only be use for post-secondary schools in Ontario but secondary schools as well (Patterson et al, 2015).

INDIGENOUS SERVING INSTITUTIONS

The province of Ontario is home to nine Aboriginal institutes that partner with colleges and universities to offer degree programs, apprenticeship programs, certificate programs, diplomas, and more.[11]

Successes

Aboriginal institutes in Ontario are successful for many reasons, although perhaps no reason is bigger than they *understand* their students. These institutions are reaching demographics of the indigenous population that are some of the most disadvantaged, such as single mothers seeking employment. These institutions have numerous programs which deploy unique ways of reaching and retaining students, such as Oshki-Pimache-O-Win's blended learning model. Through the blended learning model at Oshki-Pimache-O-Win, students from throughout the province attend two 2-week intensive seminars on-campus in order to attain necessary in-person components, and then have the freedom to complete the rest of the semester at a distance through self-paced e-learning modules. This freedom is important for those who must provide for their families while pursuing post-secondary education.

Similarly, the faculty at Aboriginal institutes are typically from indigenous backgrounds, which allows for them to cater the classroom to their students. As we spoke with students at these institutions, the tailored approach was among the top reasons students felt comfortable in these courses. Students had instructors who came from the same communities as themselves and felt empowered in the classroom. Evidence suggests the graduation rates for Aboriginal students are higher at Aboriginal institutes (SSCSAST, 2011).

9   Read more at the *Transitions* project: http://oneca.com/transitions/colleges-and-universities.html
10 Read more on O'odham Ki at: http://www.life.arizona.edu/getting-started/featured-communities/oodham-ki
11 Read more on the nine institutes at: https://www.ontario.ca/page/aboriginal-institutes

Recommendations

1. **Create pathways to accreditation for indigenous serving institutions and push them to pursue said process.** Lack of accreditation is one of the most pressing issues for Aboriginal institutes in Ontario. When a student graduates from one of these programs, their degree is conferred through another college or university. This lack of accreditation can be troubling for multiple reasons. Above all, the Aboriginal institutes are not receiving all of the funding, as the accrediting institution receives a large portion of the tuition and fees, even though all of the services (admissions, instruction, etc.) are being dispensed by the Aboriginal institute. Additionally, instructors must conform to the curriculum mandated by the accrediting institutions, even if the curriculum goes against traditional indigenous knowledge. Instructors must use the books prescribed by the accrediting institution, including books that are often out of the price range of their students' budgets.

In 2015, Six Nations Polytechnic took a big step forward on this front as it was given the right to confer university degrees in the Aboriginal languages of Cayuga and Mohawk (Fragomeni, 2016). This accreditation shows much promise for establishing an indigenous university in the region in the future, but there is still a long way to go.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the United States may serve as a model for Aboriginal institutes going forward. As stated in U.S. Executive Order 13592, TCUs "maintain, preserve, and restore Native languages and cultural traditions; offer a high quality college education; provide career and technical education, job training, and other career building programs; and often serve as anchors in some of the country's poorest and most remote areas." There are currently 35 accredited TCUs in the U.S. with 2 additional TCUs working toward accreditation.[12] These institutions have become symbolic of tribal sovereignty, as they are operated *by* tribal nations *on* tribal lands.

LOCAL TRAINING AND WORK PLACEMENT

As distance continues to be a barrier for many rural, remote, First Nations communities, this section examines the local opportunities for post-secondary education *in* these communities. These opportunities are especially important for indigenous youth between the ages of 15-30, which are the fastest growing population segment in Canada and will be counted on to fulfill the positions left vacant by retiring generations.

Successes

Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS) is one of the leaders in the development of skilled workforces in indigenous communities. Grand River Employment and Training (GREAT) is one example of this, offering a broad range of services and resources for the Six Nations in southern Ontario. GREAT not only trains Six Nations community members but also provides pathways to employment through partnerships with various industries. Many colleges and universities have also partnered to deliver various opportunities in these communities – some have even reached into high schools to provide dual-credit opportunities.

Dual-credit programs are programs that allow for a student to use certain course credits toward their high school diploma as well as toward their post-secondary degree or certificate. These programs have shown to be especially effective for "at-risk" students and students from underrepresented backgrounds, with research

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12 Read more about TCU accreditation at: http://www.aihec.org/our-stories/accreditation.htm

showing increased retention rates, graduation rates, and ACT scores (Stephenson, 2012). If students are able to start earning college credits while going to high school, they are more likely to find employment or pursue post-secondary education upon completing secondary school. A recent skills report from the Government of Ontario seeks to expand these opportunities via work placement programs, which allow for hands-on experience in an on-the-job training environment.[13]

Recommendations

1. **Implement Grade 10-12 bridge programs.** Many indigenous students graduate Grade 12 and find themselves still behind their peers when they enter college or university. While Ontario, and Canada at-large, has been innovative in expanding dual-credit programs to high schools, there is room to expand even further. In the United States, some dual-credit programs begin as early as Grade 9. These programs are not only valuable for graduation and retention purposes, but also serve to bridge the gap that many high school graduates see when they enter college or university, as their high schools are so often below-par.

In the United States, in states such as Kentucky, post-secondary institutions will partner with public school districts to offer opportunities for secondary schools. High school students attend traditional high school classes for half of the day and take regular college courses or technical training for the other half of the day, mixing with the general college student population. These programs are especially impactful for high schools that are chronically underfunded, as the students are able to take higher-level coursework that would not otherwise be offered.

ONLINE AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Throughout the 21st century, the rise of the Internet has made the world more interconnected than ever, and as a result, education has experienced an unprecedented shift to online learning. Online learning serves to overcome geographical barriers, such as those we see with remote indigenous groups.

Successes

Serving Ontario since 1986, Contact North | Contact Nord plays a critical role in providing online and distance learning opportunities. Operating in more than 600 small, remote, rural, Aboriginal, and Francophone communities, Contact North | Contact Nord provides access that was not possible before. This access is particularly important for indigenous learners, as Contact North | Contact Nord manages learning centres in 27 First Nations communities and services more than 50 others through outreach from its online learning centres.[14] Through Contact North | Contact Nord, students are able to choose from more than 1,000 programs and 18,000 courses.

There are over 130 First Nations in Ontario that do not have enough students to sustain a high school. Many students must leave their homes at an early age and move to a city to attain secondary education. Numerous problems have arisen from these arrangements, including abuse in their host communities. Some challenges include culture shock, absence of home connections and feeling isolated. At the time of this briefing, an inquest into the seven deaths of Indigenous students attending school in Thunder Bay, Ontario produced 145 recommendations for improvement. Keewaytinook Internet High School (KIHS) has provided an alternative to this in the form of online secondary education. Having been in operation since 1999 and now

13 Read more on the report at: https://files.ontario.ca/hsw_rev_engaoda_webfinal_july6.pdf
14 Read more on Contact North | Contact Nord at: http://teachonline.ca/about-us

active in 13 First Nation communities, KIHS has seen its numbers climb to very successful rates, with retention rates being as high as 90% in some communities (Potter, n.d.). Furthermore, many secondary graduates of schools like KIHS are already accustomed to the online learning environment and thrive in their online post-secondary coursework.

Recommendations

1. **Host an e-learning conference and target indigenous stakeholders.** As e-learning takes hold at institutions throughout the province, there is a large need for institutions to share best practices in order to maximize potential in the province. An e-learning conference could feature seminars for post-secondary institutions to learn from one another, invite e-learning experts from around the world to learn about what is happening elsewhere, and give indigenous communities a voice in adapting the e-learning models to their unique populations. There are conferences happening all around the world on e-learning that could serve as a model for such a conference, such as the Learning Solutions Conference and Expo in the U.S. [15]

2. **Invest in improving necessary infrastructure.** Although online learning may be the education of the future, not all communities are equipped for online learning. The provincial electricity grid does not reach into 24 First Nations communities, leaving some, such as Pikangikum, to rely on diesel generators for power (Bombicino, 2016). However, big steps are being made in 2016 to connect these communities to the power grid, with initiatives such as Wataynikeyap Power (owned by 20 First Nations communities) leading the way in $1.35-billion project (Ketonen, 2016).

Many First Nations communities also lack access to Internet (or consistent Internet). Recently, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) released an open letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne calling for access to high-speed Internet to be recognized as an essential infrastructure and invested in appropriately, as rural and remote communities are so often left at a disadvantage. The letter also cites research that indicates that a 10 percent increase in household broadband penetration could accelerate economic growth by up to 1.5 percentage points.[16]

In some communities, building space is also a limitation – whether that be due to a lack of resources or other factors. Flooding threats have wreaked havoc in Attawapiskat, even causing the only hospital in the community to evacuate in 2013 (Loriggio). The Kashechewan community has also been battling floods, and government promises, for more than a decade. Starting in 2005, the Kashechewan community was promised $500 million in funding to move their community to higher ground, however, when the conservative party went into power in 2006, that funding was cut to just $200 million (Dehaas, 2016). Today, the community has felt the consequences of those actions, having evacuated more than 400 residents in 2016 alone. In a community with about 280 homes, more than 40 of those homes are boarded up due to mold or flooding damage (Dehaas, 2016). Better infrastructure is needed in order to sustain the e-learning to come, so that organizations like Contact North | Contact Nord may expand their educational partners offerings via more learning centres and students are not forced to leave their communities.

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15 Read more about the conference at: http://www.elearningguild.com/LSCon/content/4100/learning-solutions-2016-conference--expo--home/

16 As cited in the OCC letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne: *Czernich et al. (2009). University of Munich. Impact of Broadband on the Economy. International Telecommunications Union.* https://www.itu.int/ITU-D/treg/broadband/ITU-BB-Reports_Impact-of-Broadband-on-the-Economy.pdf

CONCLUSION

Post-secondary education is of utmost importance to indigenous development and should be a priority for both the provincial and federal governments. Equity, culture, and innovation are the three cornerstones for post-secondary education going forward:

1. Equitable funding for not only education but the necessary infrastructure in indigenous communities;

2. Culturally relevant courses and programming that intertwine indigenous traditions and histories with learners' education and training, and;

3. Innovative solutions that keep pace with technology of the 21st century, including Internet access, the use of online courseware, and potential databases for information sharing.

While there are some solutions that are happening on a national level, there is much that may be learned between provinces and between countries, in the case of the United States. Altogether, Ontario and Canada may serve as an example when it comes to supporting indigenous populations – an example to not only the United States but to the rest of the world. However, there is still much more to be done.

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