

*Native Education Policy Review*

*Alberta Learning*

***SHARED VOICES AND VISIONS:  
TREATY 7 FIRST NATIONS DIALOGUE  
ON EDUCATION***

*by Treaty 7 First Nations Education Systems*

*April 2000*

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## ***Native Education Policy Review – Alberta Learning***

Report – submitted by Treaty 7 First Nations

### ***I. A Brief History of the Treaty Seven First Nations***

Treaty Seven was a peace treaty made between two nations - the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Piikani {Peigan} and Kainai {Blood}), Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee), the Nakoda (Bears paw, Chiniki, and Wesley/Goodstoney) and Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, by Her Commissioners, the honourable David Laird, Lieutenant Governor and Indian Superintendent of the North-West Territories, and James Farquharson Macleod, C.M.G., Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police.

When Treaty Seven was made in 1877, it became the last in a series of agreements concluded between the Government of Canada and the First Nations of the North-West during the decade of the 1870's. From the Canadian government's perspective, the need for Treaty Seven was immediate and simple. As part of the terms of bringing British Columbia into Confederation in 1871, the Canadian government had promised to build a transcontinental railway within ten years. Such a line would have to traverse land still under the control of First Nations. Huge land concessions would need to be offered to the company building the railway and later, the existence of the line would encourage large-scale immigration to the western prairies.

When the British North America Act was passed in 1867, the responsibility for Indians and Indian lands had been vested in the federal government of Canada. Further, the government was bound by the terms of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which recognized Indians as rightful occupiers of their hunting grounds. This meant that the railway could not be built until the rights of the Indians along the proposed route had been settled. Therefore, the government of Canada systematically made treaties with all tribes in the arable regions now known as the Prairie Provinces including the 50,000 square miles of land south of the Red Deer River and adjacent to the Rocky Mountains, the lands occupied by the First Nations that made Treaty 7.

The making of Treaty 7 occurred at "Blackfoot Crossing" which is located on the Siksika Nation east of Calgary. In summary, the Treaty made provisions for one square mile for each Indian family, plus a supply of cattle, some farm equipment and a small amount of ammunition and money. The treaty also made commitments on the part of the Queen to provide education and medical services to members. To our understanding, these commitments were to be understood in their broadest sense. While no clauses limited these rights, the federal and provincial governments continue to greatly restrict the extent to which they are willing to honor the rights negotiated by their ancestors (Tsuu T'ina).

The Articles of Treaty 7 outlined the land areas for each nation, but even in these cases where our benefits were made explicit, the federal government has seen fit to unilaterally

deny us rights to great portions of these lands. Over time, the federal government of Canada has greatly reduced our land bases to where the present day reserves now exist. There are currently outstanding land claims pertaining to these areas originally negotiated in the treaties.

In stark contrast, to this day, the newcomers have enjoyed the rights and privileges granted them through the Treaty to the fullest, that is, the use of our land. In fact, we argue that where the federal government of Canada (and its provincial counterparts) could benefit from a liberal interpretation of the treaty, they have done so without hesitation. For example, we know our ancestors only agreed to share the land to the depth of the plough. Natural resources were never transferred in the treaty making process but this fact never stopped the newcomers from trying to “legally transfer” them through the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement/Arrangements. These transfers were made without First Nations’ consent which is why there is a Legal Action taking place now (Tsuu T’ina). The fact that this “transfer” is under legal challenge has not prevented Alberta communities, with the exception of our First Nations, from receiving benefits associated with natural resource revenues for many years. Our claim is not only that the original Agreement is illegal but also that the province owes the First Nations for all those years of exclusion. Further, we argue that current and future revenue sharing details must be worked out between First Nations and the Alberta government.

## ***Profiles of Treaty 7 First Nations***

### ***The Treaty 7 Tribal Council***

The Treaty 7 Tribal Council is an advisory/liaison office to the Treaty 7 First Nations comprised of the Kainai Nation, Piikani Nation, Siksika Nation, Nakoda Nation and Tsuu T’ina Nation. While each of these nations have their own Education authority, a Treaty 7 Education Steering Committee was established to coordinate joint initiatives. The Committee is comprised of the Directors/Superintendents of Education from each of the jurisdictions. The Treaty 7 Director of Education employed at the Treaty 7 office coordinates the joint initiatives and priorities of the nations.

The following is a brief description of each of the Treaty 7 First Nations.

### ***Kainai Nation***

The Kainai Reserve, which is the largest reserve in Canada (in area), is located approximately 200 km south of Calgary. The membership role includes 8,900 Kainai people. It straddles Highway #2 south of Fort Macleod, and stretches west of Cardston in the south to the Lethbridge city-limits in the northeast. The Kainai business community is located in the townsite of Standoff. The Kainai are a tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy and three dialects of the Blackfoot Language are spoken here.

The Kainai Board of Education oversees the education programs and services (Headstart to Grade 12) of the nation. There are 4 schools on the reserve serving 1,269 students. As well, the Board holds tuition agreements with 4 provincial school districts for 865 students. The on-reserve school enrollment has increased to 60% of the total resident student population compared to 45% before local control in 1988. Another 828 students reside off reserve. The schools all have very active Parent Advisory Committee members. These members provide direction on programs and expenditures.

The Nation also has Red Crow Community College a public adult/post secondary institution of the tribe. An elected Board governs the operations of the college. Red Crow has the distinction of being the first First Nations Institute to be accredited by the First Nations Accreditation Board. Red Crow is a founding member of the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC).

### ***Piikani Nation***

The Piikani Nation is located along Highway #3 midway between the towns of Fort Macleod and Pincher Creek. The business centre is at the Bocket townsite located on the reserve along the highway. The Piikani were the smallest Blackfoot Tribe to sign Treaty 7, though with the Blackfoot Tribe in the neighboring State of Montana, they form the largest tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

When the Piikani signed the Treaty, they asked for "the Oldman River, the Porcupine Hills, and Crow Creeks" to be their home base, as these were their favorite wintering areas which provided a good base to hunt buffalo. When the buffalo began to disappear, the Piikani were encouraged to go to their new reserve to learn agriculture and become farmers. The Piikani speak a dialect of the Blackfoot language as do their fellow Blackfoot Tribes.

### ***Siksika Nation***

The Siksika Nation is located approximately 100 kilometers east of the city of Calgary, and three kilometers south of the Trans Canada Highway #1. The administrative and business district of Siksika is strategically located adjacent to the town of Gleichen.

Siksika has a total population of approximately 5,200 members. The Siksika are the northernmost tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Siksika Nation is currently governed by a Chief and twelve Councilors, all of whom are elected by members of the tribe for two-year terms. Siksika in the mother tongue means "Blackfoot".

The Siksika Chief and Council are the ultimate authority for the education of Siksika residents. The school system has 3 schools on the reserve that cater to 750 students. Tuition agreements are held with three provincial county school systems to which students are bused from the Siksika Nation.

Old Sun Community College was established by the Siksika Nation in 1972 to address the learning needs of the adult population. Since the founding of the college many students have continued on to other institutes of higher learning. Old Sun is a founding member of both FNAHEC and the First Nations Accreditation Board.

### ***Nakoda Nation (Bearspaw, Chiniki, Wesley)***

The Nakoda Nation is composed of three bands: Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Wesley/Goodstone. The lands that make up the Nakoda Nation are found in three separate locations. The Eden Valley reserve lies to the south of Morley; the Big Horn reserve to the north; and the main Nakoda reserve is located along the Trans Canada Highway #1, midway between Calgary and Banff at the Morley townsite which is situated beside the Bow River.

As descendants of the Sioux nations, the Nakoda tribal members speak the Siouan mother tongue.

The Nakoda Education Authority controls programs for 753 (65%) students in three different schools located at Morley, Eden Valley and Big Horn. Another 403 (35%) students attend off-reserve schools.

### ***Tsuu T'ina Nation***

The Tsuu T'ina nation is located adjacent to southwest Calgary city limits. It is accessible via Anderson Road SW from Calgary. Limited access to parts of the reserve is also available via Highways #22 and #8.

The Tsuu T'ina, descended from the Athapaskan speaking people, which include the Navajo and Apache of the south and the Dene and Chippewa of the north.

There are two on-reserve schools operated by the Tsuu T'ina Board of Education. Tsuu T'ina, the Department of Indian Affairs and the provincial systems (Calgary Public, Calgary Separate and Rockyview) have tripartite tuition agreements for the students attending those schools.

## ***II. Reflections on Education – Past, Present and Future***

The treaties that our forefathers made gave us a special status and rights in our homeland for “as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows.” Our elders have always encouraged us to recognize that education is one of our fundamental treaty rights and to fight for quality education for our children’s sake. To have our issues dealt with in

one category of “Aboriginal education” is to forsake the sacred agreement made by our ancestors. There is far too much at stake to continue to permit narrow interpretation and less than full implementation of the true spirit and intent of the agreements that our ancestors made on our behalf.

Members of our communities told us that traditional holistic education taught values and traditions to our people but that the education that has been imposed on us was intended to change or re-develop our lifestyles to that of the newcomers. Reference was made about our trusting the newcomers when the treaty was made, “thinking that they had our best interests in mind but we were fooled and residential schools were opened” (Nakoda). From the beginning, formal schooling has been intended to teach us to speak, think, dress, worship and pray in English and, thus, to forget our customs, traditions and practices (Reverend M. Wolfleg papers). The first school teachers were missionaries who were used as a tool of assimilation by teaching according to the standards as set by the dominant Christian based teachings of the Europeans. Government civil servants eventually replaced the missionaries as teachers. Regardless of who have staffed these schools our community members had nothing positive to share about their experiences. There was an extensive discussion on the negative effects of residential schools which “traumatized the community to the extent of almost losing our culture and language. The government had almost succeeded in their goal of totally assimilating the First Nations people” (Nakoda).

When the boarding schools did not appear to succeed in totally changing our people, a series of other measures or “quick fixes” were implemented. The “one-way integration” era saw our young students bused off the reserve to nearby public schools. Also, students who reached high school levels were taken from their First Nations and placed with urban families to attend city high schools. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s schools on reserves were being shut down as more and more students were being bused to off reserve schools. It was at this time that concerned parents took a stand and fought to keep schools open and their children at home. Our leaders began in earnest to garner support for “Indian Control of Indian Education.” All law making powers and authorities up to now had been reserved for provincial and federal governments. The Treaty 7 First Nations took over control of their schools in the 1980’s and although they are still bound by outside jurisdiction and authorities, they have nonetheless shown what is possible, even within limited control. (More specifics are presented in a later section.)

While First Nations have given much thought to how our people should be educated, “First Nations governments have been left out of the realm of decision making when it comes to our own needs as it relates not only to education, but especially education” (Tsuu T’ina). Federal and provincial governments continue to ignore the different reports that have been generated by our education leaders such as **Indian**

*“Much of what we are dealing with today is a reflection of the federal and provincial governments dealing with First Nations issues, such as education, without any involvement from First Nations people that are directly affected by these policies that reflect only the aspirations of the dominant culture” (Tsuu T’ina).*

**Control of Indian Education, 1972; Traditions and Change: Towards a Vision of our Future, 1988** and so on. They rely instead on studies that reflect their euro-perspectives. One example is the **Hawthorne Report** that advocates policies of assimilation. Because of how we have been treated, our elders express that, “We, as a First Nations people are just like a herd of buffalo being chased over a cliff, much like the Buffalo Jump” (Nakoda).

Many of our people have a basic mistrust in the education system and have little faith working “in partnership” with a provincial and federal government who have done little to acknowledge or fulfil their basic treaty rights. And, although we agreed to participate in this research, our readers should be aware that our mistrust has impacted Treaty 7 participation at all levels. It affected our initial contact with Alberta Learning, what information our members are willing to share, and extends to our expectations of what will come of our input.

### *III. Treaty 7 Involvement in the Alberta Learning Review*

At the beginning of the 1999 summer school break, the Treaty 7 Tribal Council Director of Education received a draft contract from Alberta Learning with regard to holding community consultation sessions as part of a review of education programs and services for Treaty and Metis students by their department. The Director did not act on the contract because we have a protocol to be respected. The Director does not sign contracts that involve the individual First Nations unless the terms have been genuinely negotiated with our First Nations. In this case, the Education Directors from our individual Nations had not even been informed of the review to take place, let alone determined if and how they would participate in the process. The proposed Alberta Review process was off to a shaky start due to the unilateral imposition of a research agenda by Alberta Learning and their assumption that our First Nations would accept this paternalistic process. In our eyes, this was hardly the beginning (or continuation) of a true partnership.

For several other reasons, the Treaty 7 Director of Education was reluctant to act immediately on the contract. In Treaty 7, our individual nations determine their unique relationships with the province. Many of our Nations deal directly with the various off reserve education jurisdictions. Our Nations negotiate their own tuition agreements or the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND) undertakes this on their behalf. In addition, the time that the review would take was also of concern. The Treaty 7 Director of Education did not have the luxury of time to commit a block of time to “work” for Alberta Learning.

It was not until September that the Treaty 7 Education Steering Committee (comprised of Directors from each Nation) had an opportunity to hear about the review and to study the terms of the contract. The work was to include feedback about the provincial schools that our Treaty students attend. One of the jurisdictions offered to review the contract with the possibility of that jurisdiction tackling the contract instead of the Treaty 7 Director’s

office. However, upon reviewing the proposed work plan, that jurisdiction decided against taking on the contract because it was not financially worth it to take staff away from their duties to devote time to coordinating the work. Consulting with our nations is a much greater undertaking than what the province envisioned.

### ***Rationale for Involvement in the Native Education Policy Review***

Treaty 7 Nations are not satisfied with the fact that Alberta Learning did not include them in the initial decision-making process for this review. The Steering Committee did however deem it important to become involved because of ongoing dissatisfaction of how the 1985/86 review had been conducted. Over the years, our Nation members have expressed numerous concerns about the quality of educational services our people receive off reserve. Involvement in the Alberta Learning Review was

*“Overall our needs cannot be compromised or undermined by policy-making bureaucrats, when the overall wellbeing of First Peoples is being neglected. The state of and systems of education delivery to our people is in much need of proper representation” (Tsuu T’ina).*

seen as an opportunity to solicit community input to expose those forces that enhance or impede efforts to attain quality education for our Treaty 7 First Nations members. We care about our members who are in off-reserve schools because they often do not have a voice and this was an opportunity for them to air their views. Thus, in spite of earlier misgivings, Old Sun Community College, a tribally controlled institution on the Siksika Nation signed the contract for the Treaty 7 Nations with the understanding that the process would be coordinated by the Treaty 7 Director of Education.

### ***Schedule of Treaty 7 Activities***

Immediately upon signing the contract work began to organize an orientation session for community meeting facilitators. Education Directors/Superintendents from each Nation were requested to assign local people to schedule, advertise and make all arrangements for the community dialogue sessions. Once hired, the facilitators made arrangements for the recording of the sessions.

The Nations used various methods to publicize the meetings. Notices were sent out with all students. Posters were posted in strategic locations (public buildings). Announcements were made in local papers and community radio stations. Some Nations (such as Siksika) placed fliers in every mailbox of their local postal station. In each Nation, facilitators telephoned various groups and agencies on the reserves who could act as gatekeepers, advertising the upcoming community meetings.

The following table lists the community meetings held in the Treaty 7 area.

Table 1 - Treaty 7 Community Meetings

LOCATION/PARTICIPANTS	DATE:
<b>Kainai – 300</b>	
- Lavern School	January 31
- Saipoyi School	February 1
- Red Crow Community College	February 2
- Kainai High School	February 3
- Sikoohkotoki Friendship Centre, Lethbridge	February 4
<b>Piikani -</b>	
- Community meeting	
- Elder Meeting	
- Third Meeting – small audience (by questionnaires)	
<b>Siksika Nation -</b>	
- Siksika Nation High School	January 31
- Old Sun Community College	February 2
- Little Washington Center	February 2
- Bridge Community Center	February 3
- Old Sun Community College	February 17
<b>Nakoda Nation – 90</b>	
- Morley Community School	February 4
- Ta-Otha Community, Rocky Mountain House	February 7
- Eden Valley	February 14
<b>Tsuu Tina Nation – 59</b>	
- Tsuu T’ina Community Workshop	January 31
- Tsuu T’ina Parent Workshop	February 3

***Treaty 7 Level Meetings:***

Throughout the process of organizing, holding, and summarizing what took place at the community meetings, the directors of education and facilitators met together at the Treaty 7 level. Prior to the community meetings, the Directors/Superintendents held a joint meeting with Alberta Learning to ask questions about the review and draft contract. Facilitators also met with the Treaty 7 Education Steering Committee to discuss the process(es) they could adopt at their local level. From January 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Treaty 7 held an orientation and training workshop for their facilitators.

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, after meetings were held in each community, facilitators met as a group with the Treaty 7 Education Steering Committee to discuss their findings and outline the major themes discussed by their Nation members. They met again April 3<sup>rd</sup>, to review the draft report, in preparation for presentation of the research at the Treaty 7 Leadership Symposium on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

## ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data for this report came from the series of community meetings, discussions with individuals and questionnaires to students. Facilitators and note takers were contracted for each of the community meetings. The facilitators scheduled, publicized and facilitated each of the meetings in their communities. They then summarized the meeting notes and submitted them to the Treaty 7 office. A meeting of the facilitators was arranged to give a verbal summary of the meetings. Some key theme areas were presented and further information was provided as requested. The contents of the reports were then categorized and reported according to key themes identified by Treaty 7 contract staff. There was no attempt to calculate the frequency with which each issue was raised. Our communities told us that all issues were important and needed attention. The draft report was circulated to each jurisdiction and a final meeting was held with directors and facilitators.

## ***Limitations of the Review***

Although each of the facilitators diligently scheduled and arranged for community meetings several factors impeded the work. The following are some factors that impacted on work plans:

### **A) Scheduling Difficulties**

The timeframe to complete the workshops was too short. Our Directors did not approve Treaty 7 involvement in the Alberta Learning review or determine their process until December and yet the scheduled deadline for the submission of a report to Alberta Learning at the end of March did not change. The time allotted by Alberta Learning would not have permitted proper consultation to take place between the Treaty 7 Director of Education and the Directors from each of the Treaty 7 Nations. Nor would it have allowed for the proper time for our facilitators to plan and carry out community meetings. As it was, there were problems experienced by the communities in setting meeting dates. Deaths of community members, conflicts with other meeting schedules and a very short timeframe to notify community members of scheduled or re-scheduled workshops negatively affected the number of people who could attend our workshops. We had the difficult task of balancing our need to take the information we summarized back to our communities for approval with meeting our contract obligations with Alberta Learning. As a compromise, we took some time to receive community feedback (but not as much as we would have liked) before submitting our draft report one month after the Alberta Learning deadline.

### **B) Difficulty in Obtaining Information**

Another major difficulty experienced during this review was related to obtaining information from Alberta Learning and INAC personnel. For example, student enrollment data was requested, but when information was finally received, it was incomplete and there were discrepancies on the sets of data provided by each.

Some of our community members were also reluctant to disclose too much information if it was to end up in the hands of the government. This hesitation stemmed, in part, from their mistrust of the provincial and federal governments. Also many of our community members shared the sentiment: “There have been so many surveys and reports done and nothing has come out of these” (Piikani).

#### ***IV. Report on What our Community Members Said***

This section of the document presents the main points and issues expressed at the community meetings which pertain to Alberta Learning and its program and services. Once the community sessions started, community members welcomed the opportunity to dialogue. The feedback was, “We need regular meetings like this to help keep the people informed about our children’s education” (Nakoda).

*“Our people need to be made aware of the importance of the review and more time is needed so that more people can listen and give their views. These are very vital issues and not one can be taken lightly” (Piikani).*

By having our Nation members conduct the review for their own communities, our people had the opportunity to give input in their mother tongue. In fact, some community meetings were held in the traditional language of the people. For example, Nakoda conducted all their community meetings in the Nakoda language and the quality of the translation captures what the people have said.

The input from the community discussions is presented in two main sections: Early Childhood Services (ECS) to Grade 12 and Adult/Post Secondary Education. Issues within these broad categories are clustered according to key themes. We have chosen to present our community discussions as a dialogue to provide the full context of the issues presented; however, some of the comments within the themes are given in point form and are in random order. Each issue is to be considered as important and taken as seriously as the next.

In the passages that follow, it is important to clarify two points. First, when participants are cited as using the term " Native," they are referring to First Nation people of the Treaty 7 Nations. We could not presume to make recommendations for other Aboriginal groups. Secondly, it appears incumbent upon us to explain why we did not present this section according to the reporting framework provided by Alberta Learning. Alberta Learning’s goals and objectives, as they relate to First Nations, in conducting this research are as follows:

1. To improve First Nation learner success.

2. To recognize and increase parental involvement in the education of First Nation learners.
3. To strengthen partnerships and relationships between First Nation school jurisdictions, post secondary institutions, apprenticeship providers, vocational and technical schools, industry and government.
4. To foster a greater appreciation and understanding by all Albertans of First Nations people.

In our attempt to categorize according to these areas, we realized that our First Nations only have one goal and that is to improve learner success. All of the other goals identified by Alberta Learning are simply ways of ensuring this goal becomes a reality. Therefore, we have organized our findings according to the critical educational areas that our community members said need to be addressed. Our community discussions related to Early Childhood Services (ECS) to Grade 12 are presented in the following themes.

We first discuss concerns about the curriculum and learning resources used in Alberta schools. Section 1 discusses how the curriculum must be re-designed to make it more meaningful and of better quality in terms of meeting the needs of our First Nations. Section 2 discusses how the curriculum for all Albertans must be enhanced to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of First Nations. Enhancing the curriculum is not possible without the development of learning resources under the direct control of First Nations. Currently in Alberta our First Nation schools, catering to an important segment of the Alberta population, are excluded from grants available to Alberta schools. Issues related to learning resources are presented in section 3.

Other themes that emerged from our community discussions dealt with how student success is impeded by methods of delivery or the practices used. In section 4 we present issues discussed about how assessments are done and what they are used for. Too often these assessments label our students and instead of the results being used to advocate for them they are provided “special treatment” often with negative consequences. The community concerns with regard to special education and their visions of how they want all of our children to be loved and served are presented in section 5. Included in section 6 are the learner supports that must be provided and how those that exist must be improved.

Section 7 is devoted to discussions about school personnel. How well our students do is determined in large measure by these staff. We need personnel who will provide genuine help and hope. Our community members described how too many of our students encounter unsympathetic personnel. Concerns were expressed also about how well intentioned staff are not supported to address the many needs of the students.

Section 8 summarizes many of the issues related to accountability. Our community members posed questions about seeing hard data showing what we have gained from provincial schools and at what cost. Since the 1960’s our children have been bussed into neighboring towns and yet how have our members and communities benefited for all those years?

Our community members welcomed the opportunity to express their views about the education of their children and they spoke of how they have been excluded from decision making with regard to the education of their children. The community involvement dialogue is presented in section 9. Section 10 discusses that more opportunities must be provided to review jurisdiction and authority issues.

In section 11 our community members shared how we are better able to respond to First Nations needs with schools under First Nations control. They expressed especially that First Nations schools could make even greater progress if funding constraints were addressed.

Much of the discussion related to post secondary issues revolved around six major themes. First, our community members challenge the extent to which the education our children receive in ECS through Grade 12 provides them with a solid foundation for “higher education.” Second, our communities spoke at length about the need to help our students who seek post secondary education off reserve prepare for the move from reserve to city life. Third, our people worry about the financial struggles our students face and the impact of financial hardship on their ability to stay focused on and complete their studies. Fourth, our members emphasize the need to provide various student support services to help them address physical, psychological, social, cultural and political challenges they may encounter. Fifth, our people demand that our students receive a post secondary education that honors their culture. Much discussion revolved around our ability to have local post-secondary institutes which are First Nations controlled and operated. Finally, community discussion also included an area that remains largely ignored: the link between education and employment.

Within each of these areas, we present some of the experiences told by our community members, the major barriers that prevent successful learner outcomes they identified and we end by providing our community’s recommendations regarding what measures need to occur to improve learner outcomes.

## ***A. Early Childhood Services to Grade 12 Issues***

### ***1. We Demand Meaningful and Quality Education - Curriculum***

Many of the comments in regards to curriculum point out how the curriculum has short changed not only individual students but also our First Nations communities. The transmission of many practices and values cherished by our peoples has been severely compromised by the education that has been provided for our students. The Alberta curriculum does not instill pride in our children, especially as it relates to cultural content (Tsuu T’ina). All of the Treaty 7 Nations lamented about how our people have changed. All strongly urge that our language, culture, and history be taught to our children and in an integrated fashion.

Although it was noted that, “If parents are sending their children to schools outside, then the parents need to teach them their language and traditional values because the outside systems do not listen to our concerns because these systems have their own agenda”(Kainai). Unfortunately, in many instances the parents are not able to teach this knowledge because of being robbed of the opportunity to learn it themselves during their own residential school experience.

Language courses that are being offered in the public systems are not adequate because language is often taught in isolation. Also, students that transfer into the public system often have to repeat the language and culture content they already know or studied at the First Nations schools so the work becomes very elementary. In addition the knowledge and skills taught in the language and culture classes are not usually offered in a sequential manner.

Concerns were raised also about how the public schools do not take our tribal infrastructure needs into consideration when they take funds to educate our students. As a result what the students get does not usually prepare them for the needs of the nation. Success should not be measured merely by graduation statistics but also by what the students are able to do with the education they receive.

While the community members recognize that there are not enough jobs at the reserve level, the education system must also pay attention to the jobs required by the community. Recently, under the Labor Market Agreement and HRDC programs our people are being trained for the “cheap labor market” needs for mainstream. Our own “labor” market needs are ignored because they do not qualify under someone else’s definition of “training.” Who best knows these needs but our own people and institutions?

*“Our tribe needs to do a ‘big plan’ for the future for how we are going to absorb the hundreds of graduates who are going to be getting educated and who will need and want jobs when they are finished” (Kainai).*

The curriculum currently does not address traditional practices that could have relevance to today’s problems and may warrant attention. For example, our own traditional social and political structures and practices and how these have been interfered with are not addressed. The Piikani state, for example, that “Many of our people have forgotten what true leadership is all about. We need to teach our people the old ways of leadership and how decisions were made then. The two-year elected system is not good. Lifetime leadership was better. Our leaders were well known. In the two year system, other governments dictate to us.”

The issue of second language requirements was discussed as a concern. Some of our students are being taught in “their second language” which is English. If students speak their first language, then the second language requirement should be waived. Currently only some First Nations languages are accepted for “another language” status. The Tsuu T’ina want their language to qualify for this status (Tsuu T’ina).

Other courses are required such as lifeskills, money and credit management, and so on. Some of these courses may already be offered so the underlying question is “Are the content and methods of delivery appropriate for the student and community needs?” The answer is obviously no. Too often someone else’s curriculum and someone else’s models are adopted. The curriculum requires additions and improvements under the direction of our own professionals.

It has only been from the time that our First Nations took over control of our education at the First Nations level that the building of meaningful programs has begun. The important work being done by our nations must be supported so that other school jurisdictions may benefit from this work. The hope is that all those values that are being lost will be revived and that the curriculum would address our nation’s needs. Some of the comments made were:

- Language, culture and history bring order and responsibility back.
- We must reverse the trend from Blackfoot to English to English to Blackfoot; we owe this to those children who are now speaking English as a first language. (Siksika)
- We must incorporate native themes into the literature and the curriculum (Kainai).
- It is not enough for our graduates to have outside knowledge. They also need to have community knowledge to do a proper job (Kainai).
- We need to become more aware of our cultural values such as having compassion for our people (Kainai). We are becoming more self-centered.
- We need to listen to our elders more and show them respect (Kainai).
- We need to develop programs for youth and teenagers- I am worried for their future (Kainai).

## ***2. Fostering A Greater Appreciation And Understanding (Under First Nations Control) of First Nations People by All Albertans.***

A major and recurring theme in all the community dialogues is that the students’ backgrounds are not understood nor appreciated. The curriculum does not adequately nor accurately reflect the diversity of our nations’ histories, cultures or traditions. Educational systems are strongly urged to give cross-cultural courses for all continuing and especially new teachers to the system so that there is continuity in positive relationships (Siksika).

Not only is professional development a must for new workers with the tribe but those systems that take in our students must screen their teachers for knowledge and respect for the First Nations peoples of this land. To this end, cultural exchanges with staff are required. City/off-reserve staff could visit the reserve schools and vice versa. Students could also have exchanges.

“Cultural awareness needs to happen on both sides of the fence. Healing circles should be in place for both native and non-native students especially in schools where racial intolerance has or is happening” (Siksika).

### *3. Learning Resources and Technologies*

Our community members demand the integration of cultural content into the curriculum and they want assurance that relevant textbooks with native content are used (Siksika). More funds are required to develop curriculum on our languages, cultures and histories. The development must be under our control. Our own people must be hired; they know and understand our situation and what is best for our people (Piikani).

Not only do our people want to develop curriculum, they want to protect our intellectual property rights and have our First Nations hold copyright to materials developed. It has only been in the last few years that Nations have been able to hold copyright for materials produced. For that matter, earlier exploitation of our peoples' knowledge must be addressed. The Education Minister holds copyright to our information so it is as if our languages and cultural information were stolen twice. Some First Nations want to repatriate copyright for those resources developed by Alberta Education that contain their information. Our Nation members believe that Alberta Learning needs their consent to develop curriculum and use our information. Furthermore, our nations want a voice on censorship of inappropriate or racist materials.

Besides the development and revision of curriculum the current access to resources must not discriminate against any groups. The provincial schools are eligible for extra grants such as the Learning and Library Resources Grant and the Technology Grant. Our students should not be denied equal access to any and all facilities and extra fees should not be assessed to First Nations for use of these services offered through special grants. Tuition that First Nations pay on behalf of their students supposedly includes all costs to educate a child and are based on average per student costs so the extra fees are not warranted. As will be presented in more detail in another section, schools on reserves should not be excluded from receiving these grants.

Students are denied access to public library cards if they live on the reserve even when they are bussed to attend town or city schools. They are required to pay non-resident fees making the service out of reach for people on low incomes. If there are no public libraries on reserves, then the students do not have this academic resource to turn to. The province, especially when they take tuition to educate students, should devise a plan to ensure that "their students" who they want "to have the best of opportunities to succeed" have an opportunity to access this additional resource.

#### 4. *The How and Why of Assessments: Aim for Accuracy and Advocacy*

Major concerns were expressed about how our students are assessed and then categorized according to results. Far too often inappropriate tools are used. Sometimes teachers' biased opinions also influence the placement of

*“Often First Nations children are categorized as special needs because their first language is not English and due to the cultural differences.” (Nakoda)*

students. “The provincial schools must get over the myth that our children are dumb or stupid or special needs in the sense they think. Our children simply have problems in school because they may not speak English well and they come from a different culture” (Nakoda). One of our educators commented that one may speak with an accent but they don't think with an accent (Siksika). Also, shyness is often interpreted in the provincial schools as a handicap (Kainai).

Assessments appear to be used to isolate native students into separate classes that are not very conducive to learning. Students complain that they are subjected to the same material over and over. When children fall behind, they are left there (Kainai). This means that once children are placed in Special Education they are doomed to stay there for the rest of their public education days. Assessments should be used to advocate for students and to offer them meaningful assistance instead of merely using the results to get them out of the way.

More appropriate assessments of students and scheduled updates are required to ensure they are in classes where they can reach their potential and are challenged (Siksika). Suggestions offered on how to make assessments more accurate and how to advocate for students include:

- Use a variety of components for the assessment of students' achievement (Kainai).
- Pay attention to basics and remediate as soon as possible (Kainai).
- Know the strengths and weaknesses of all students (Kainai).
- Pay attention to student maturity and readiness before moving them on (Kainai).
- Teach at child's pace.
- Do not falsely advance students where social promotions are still practiced (Kainai).
- Special needs children in “provincial schools need esteem building because of identity issues- need cultural content” (Tsuu T'ina).
- Hire assistants/counselors in class to interpret feelings (Siksika).
- Pinpoint trouble areas and devise early intervention programs.
- Look at system and demands on children – some don't fit (Siksika).
- Stop Federal funding based on labeling. How is it that Indian Affairs accepts without question public schools assessments (Kainai)?

Because of our serious concerns about issues related to special needs, more details are presented in the next section.

## ***5. Loving All Of Our Children Especially Those With Special Needs***

All of the issues already mentioned in this paper apply to all students but there are concerns and challenges that must be highlighted with regard to “students with special needs.” All students have a right to prepare a foundation for a good quality of life but too many who have been in special education classes have not been provided with job or further education skills. All the students have something to offer (Kainai) but our nation members said that many of our people have been shortchanged by the public system. Because once children are placed in Special Education, they seldom receive an education that helps them re-enter the regular system to advance to higher learning programs.

Once these students leave the public system it is as if they are “handed back” and our Nations are expected “to fix the problem.” Ironically after years of not getting anywhere in special education programs, our students often function fairly well when they do attend our adult learning programs. A student is reported to have said that she felt so robbed because her education virtually only began when she attended the adult program on the reserve. There are probably many of our members who would have strong cases to launch suits against the provincial systems of education.

Many more concerns related to Special Education were raised. The following key themes were raised specifically with respect to special education.

### ***Jurisdiction Over our Own Special Education Programs***

The Treaty 7 Education authorities established a Special Education Subcommittee because they considered this area a priority and they believe that if given the opportunity and resourcing we could do a better job of responding to needs. Our communities believe that, “our children don’t receive the quality education they are so much in need of,” and the consensus is “to keep the children as part of the community” (Kainai). Furthermore, it was suggested that we “bring back our children to the band controlled schools because we could offer cultural and language classes so that our children will then learn more about who they are and where they come from. As a result they will then have a sense of pride and self worth” (Nakoda). The only draw back to responding to the needs is that we need more funding to provide the quality education our children deserve. A Treaty 7 Special Education Subcommittee drafted a comprehensive policy on how to address the full range of needs, but this has not received much support beyond our boundaries.

*“We do as much as we can for special needs students but many times this is not enough because we cannot afford the resources.”  
(Kainai)*

Recently some of the public systems have turned away students deemed to have special needs and yet our systems do not receive the funds to provide specialized services. Even those who have been previously categorized as special needs students by the public systems are not funded as such by Indian Affairs once they return to our systems. Our nations suggested that surveys be done to identify how many students are in actual need

of special help and are not being serviced. A survey is currently being undertaken for gaps in services for the students in our schools at the Treaty 7 level, however, the challenge is how we will obtain the resources required once we have identified our needs? Supporting the First Nations systems to implement the components of their policy will be one step toward offering quality services to all of our children.

### ***Assessments Have Been a Detriment for the Special Needs Students***

Many concerns about assessments are related to how these are done and how the results are used. Our communities report that our children are being assessed by non-culturally sensitive methods, which often wrongly labels them as being slow and having severe behavioral disorders. This labeling has detrimental consequences for the students. Their peers look down on them, teachers do not have high expectations of them and, worst of all, they develop very low self-esteem. We must create our own (First Nation) methods of identifying those children who actually are in desperate need of services (Kainai).

Our communities identified the following indicators that have been wrongly used to categorize students:

- Shyness is often interpreted in the provincial schools as a handicap (Kainai).
- English is not their first language so it is assumed they can't learn.
- Their different cultures and traditions are not understood.

Another concern pertains to how the results are used. A Nakoda Elder stated: "Why are we sending our children to provincial schools when they are only going to be placed in resource rooms" (Nakoda). Instead of these resource rooms becoming a source of inspiration and help to students, their potential is not challenged and "once children fall behind they are left there" (Kainai). If the assessments are not going to be used for advocacy and to offer genuine help, then do not administer them just as an excuse to separate native students.

Our nations are fed up with assessments being used to simply to access extra funds. "How is it that Indian Affairs accepts without question, the assessments in Calgary schools?" (Tsuu T'ina). The practice for many years has been that all provincial schools have to do is to label students as special needs to obtain funds. First Nations have always had to do extensive testing to justify extra funding and then most of the time only to be told that the results do not warrant the extra funds. It is not fair provincial schools can simply label students and our own schools assessment practices are in constant question. Funding based on mere labeling must stop and the use of more appropriate criteria must be mandated to identify students with real needs.

### ***Service Delivery***

Our communities made the following comments about program delivery and some suggestions were made about alternative methods.

### *a) Use of Medication*

A very serious concern of parents is the use of drugs as a way to deal with special needs students. The side effects of the drug raised a lot of concerns for the family members (Nakoda). They demand more research and assessments before children are placed on Ritalin or any other kind of drug which may alter their behaviors. The parents want to know how it is determined that students are special needs, who recommends the administration of drugs and who are the doctors prescribing these drugs? Rather than resorting to drugs there are other creative ways to provide services for special needs.

### *b) Lack of specialized curriculum*

Our communities expressed loudly and clearly that our children attending provincial school are taught “what the mainstream society perceives as education and there are no cultural teachings in these schools. Our children are put in resource rooms because they are categorized as special needs often because English is not their first language. They are then taught the very basics of the educational curriculum”(Nakoda). Education provided for special needs must prepare them for their futures. Our communities minimum expectations of the systems is that the special needs curriculum offer:

- real life training, such as, trades;
- basic skills/life skills (Kainai)
- meet community needs and values (Kainai).

### *c) Suggested Alternatives*

Our community members offered several suggestions regarding more supportive ways of addressing our children’s needs. These include the following:

- Integrate different ways of learning into the classroom (Kainai).
  - Offer prevention programs e.g. FAS/FAE,
  - Offer culturally appropriate programs for parenting skills (Kainai)
  - Ensure that native students receive a native perspective in Provincial schools, thus hire teachers that understand native culture. (Kainai)
  - Put more focus on gifted students. (Kainai)
  - Communicate to parents to inform them of programs that are being offered. (Kainai)
  - Develop more programs for special needs children and do not just isolate them from other students. (Siksika)
- “I.O.P. programs should be eliminated as they are used to separate native students from non-native students in the provincial systems.” (Siksika)*
- Native students put into separate classrooms is not very conducive to learning. Students complain that the same material is repeated over and over
- Offer programs that involve fun/active positive experiences. (Kainai)
  - Examine carefully and develop programs for high school students (Siksika).
  - Ensure that students are not just put out of the way, for example, native students all end up at the back of the class.

- Make provision for sharing of practices that are working, for example, KBE is modeling “kimmapiipitsini” or “compassion” by trying its best to meet the needs of the disabled and FAS students.
- Teach other students about disabilities. Special Education has a bad name – children discriminate against by other children – teach tolerance (Kainai).
- Establish early intervention programs to address a range of social problems: teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol use, youth violence, racism, and so on
- Summer sessions could be held for those who were left behind so that could catch up.
- Support the construction of special centers to address speech, hearing and other physical needs of students so that they can be close to their community and families and not have to relocate (Siksika).
- Support the First Nations to build other infrastructures that would support the special needs population such as youth ranches, a long-term planning rehabilitation centre/recreation, or independent group homes (Kainai).

An important recommendation from all the discussion pertaining to special education is that we also “look at children who are able to comprehend more than their grade levels will allow... these students cannot be ignored they have special needs too” (Tsuu T’ina). There needs to be an alternative school plan for our children who are not having problems (Kainai).

### ***Staff Must Be Sensitive To Student Needs And Backgrounds***

Questions were raised about the professional background and training of specialized personnel. Are there enough trained teachers for special education? Also there were questions pertaining to staff sensitivity to students’ needs and cultural backgrounds. Teachers need to be sensitized to special needs students especially those with FAS and FAE. Schools need to ensure and enforce rules that prevent abuse of these students by other students and staff (Siksika).

Our people want assurance that the curriculum is not being taught through a biased perspective (Kainai). Because of the ignorance about the history of natives, treaties, and so on, inter-racial sensitivity awareness is considered a must (Kainai). Our communities want teachers to become aware of the experiences that Native students go through and to be open-minded rather than just looking at behaviors (Kainai).

A recommendation of elders is to encourage schools to call on the elders for guidance, support and to share historical viewpoints (Piikani). Also, more native teacher’s assistants should be hired, as they are a source of meaningful help and hope to native students (Siksika).

Alberta Learning is considered very behind in their work to sensitize their staff to respect cultural differences. Cross-cultural sessions must be organized using legitimate holders of tribal knowledge. Our own First Nations institutes must be contracted to offer these sessions.

### ***Parental Involvement***

Several suggestions were offered on how to improve parental involvement. These are:

- Offer support for parents (Kainai).
- Offer community support for special needs (Kainai).
- Provide parenting skills programs with a no-blame approach, for example, big brother/big sister programs (Kainai).
- Follow through when parents request help for their child (Kainai).
- Invite parents during classes (Kainai).
- Provide transportation for parents if they wish to come (Kainai).
- Establish advocacy group for native parents (Kainai).
- Establish support groups to begin self-development/self help (Kainai).
- When conflict arises, make sure all facts are presented and understood by all parties. Establish practices, which will help in bringing this about; e.g. use healing circle, give credence to experience. Encourage cooperation (Kainai).
- Have PAC meeting with boards to help get rid of boundaries.

### ***Supports to Enhance Learner Success***

It was observed that the support system off reserve is not good (Kainai). Several suggestions were made on how the supports for Special needs students could be improved. These are:

- Offer basic training for caregivers (Kainai).
- Hold Special needs awareness day (Kainai).
- Provide activities such as Special Olympics for character building.
- Sensitize teachers to special needs students especially those with FAS and FAE.
- Provide more guidance counselors for native students, especially those who are familiar with the federal system and regulations as well as the culture and language (Siksika).
- Hire assistants or counselors in class to interpret feelings.
- Make after school tutoring programs more accessible. If possible, these should be held during school hours if transportation is a problem.
- Arrange awareness programs for parents, students and school personnel to promote a healthy and safe environment for special needs students (Siksika).
- Offer cultural content and activities - Special needs children in Provincial schools need esteem building because of identity issues

“No matter how old the student is and no matter what the reason is for special needs, we need to make sure that their needs are met” (Piikani). It was stated in one community that “If you take a look at our school on the reserve, the special needs program is excellent” (Piikani) and this observation is in spite of the inequitable funding in comparison to what provincial schools have access to. It was recommended, however, that “we need to focus on all areas” including services for adults. “When we offer upgrading, there has to be a living allowance for adult students who have special needs. Any possible source of funding that is available should be made known to all people involved. If someone wants

to take a training on the job with special needs then there should be provision for this” (Piikani).

***We Want Assurance that Special Needs Students Benefit from Programs (Accountability)***

While our nations were interested in accountability for the funds paid for special education students, they were likewise interested in the outcomes for students. They want assurance that identified Special Needs Students are benefiting and that these monies are spent on them (Kainai).

Many of the discussions on outcomes centered around special needs programs and funding. An elder encouraged comparing funding and questioning why the provincial schools receive more funds from the federal government than the band controlled schools to educate our special needs children (Nakoda). It is well known that for years all schools had to do was label a student special needs and they received double tuition. It was even reported that a

County treasurer was caught claiming double tuition for students supposedly in “Resource classrooms” in a

*“We do not have a resource room and until such time that our school receives extra funds to offer special services or to lower pupil/teacher ratios then we will consider that we have special programs.”*

particular school; but upon further investigation by a tribal official with the school in question, it did not even offer special services of any kind as per the quote. Perhaps another audit that must be done is to find out if schools actually received funds or if the dollars just made it as far as county offices.

Another sore point in this discussion is that when a student returns to our systems Indian Affairs no longer funds for special services for these students; they all of a sudden are considered “normal.” Both the provincial and federal governments must take responsibility to ensure that once students have been identified as requiring special services the services and funding should follow them regardless of where they attend.

Another concern already covered is about children who attend Provincial schools and for whatever reason end up back in the band controlled schools in the middle of the school year. The question relating to this is what happens to the funding that the provincial schools have already received for these children (Nakoda)? There is a demand for a comprehensive evaluation of off-reserve special needs programs because of all these concerns.

***6. Learner Supports: e.g. counseling, tutors***

There were major concerns about the many challenges that students face daily when they go to school. It was noted that students need a blend of counseling, learning and support (Tsuu Tina).

There are many affective factors that impact on the students' abilities to focus on their intellectual pursuits. Many of the difficulties that students encounter are not of their making. It was expressed that many students have to face racist attitudes. Critical consciousness must be raised about systemic racism. Non-native staff and students must confront their own bigotry and be more aware of all those forces that impact on others and take responsibility to change their own behaviors. Among the problems that native students encounter are bullying and name-calling; these must be addressed before they get out of hand. For too long the victims, our students, are blamed and end up being the ones pushed out of the system. Those that instigate the verbal abuse and racist actions against our students are protected by the system. Nothing is ever done to address the bigotry and this is carried on into adulthood. Our own students and their parents do not have advocates. Even when the parents do connect with the school personnel they are confronted with the same "bullying" and arrogance that their children encounter day after day. It was mentioned that "because parents are not heard and they are always to blame, they lose interest in their children's education." (Nakoda) The quote provides an example of how parental involvement is sometimes treated by the public schools.

*"Our students going off the reserve are subjected to a lot of ignorance, our kids have to fight. The principals treat the kids the same way."*

*"I went to the school to discuss why my child did not want to go to school and all the counselor offered to me was a handbook on parenting, of course based on non-native ideals. The finger was pointed at me and they could not fathom that they might have something to do with the problem."  
(Siksika)*

Suggestions for alleviating some of the emotional and social concerns are to:

- organize tolerance and understanding workshops
- work with other agencies (Kainai)
- establish support groups for all ages of students (Kainai)
- provide support for students who are single parents
- offer early intervention programs, hiring elders and other community people knowledgeable about traditional practices, for example:
  - teach teen violence prevention (Kainai).
  - hold workshops on teen pregnancies (Kainai).
  - Update the curriculum to address Fetal alcohol syndrome and other disorders.

Besides the affective factors that impact on students, for many, academic supports are not available. Schools can enhance academic supports in the following ways:

- Publicize all scholarships available to students (Kainai).
- Establish a plan for access to computers and other learning resources
- Make after school tutoring programs accessible. Tutoring should be made available regardless of grade. If possible, these should be held during school hours where transportation is a problem (Siksika).

- Provide guidance to junior and senior high school students on the academic routes available to them and how they can meet the requirements
- Provide guidance on college and university preparation (Siksika).
- Offer literacy programs for elementary and high school students.
- Have school supplies available to all off-reserve students as they are presently available to on-reserve students.

The many emotional, intellectual, social and material needs of students must be addressed to increase their chances of success.

*Basic Needs – e.g. daycare, transportation*

Several basic needs for students were identified by community members. Among the suggestions for addressing those areas that impact on student success are:

- To establish day care for students who need it.
- To provide meals (breakfast and lunch) for students (Kainai).
- To identify ways and means to enable native students to participate in extra-curricular activities making transportation available (Siksika).

It was noted that the further away Treaty Indian students are from their reserve the less they get. Eventually they end up with nothing. This also includes transportation costs (Siksika). Our community members want transportation provided for off-reserve students who want to attend reserve schools. It was stated that “Transportation has always been a one-way street” (Tsuu T’ina).

***7. We Need Personnel Who will Provide Genuine Help and Hope***

Many comments were made in regards to the personnel who work on a day to day basis with our students. Many community members alluded to racist attitudes and behaviors of teachers. An example of the negative behavior is that if a child retaliates because of name-calling, the instigator of the abuse (verbal and otherwise) is often not held responsible for initiating the conflict.

*“Disciplinary procedures should be fair when confrontations occur between native and non-native students and teachers and native students. At present the native student, in general, has been the loser” (Siksika).*

It was deemed critical that intolerable actions by staff and students be not taken lightly by systems and that a plan of action be in place to address these behaviors. Among the minimum expectations of teachers by community members are that they be culturally aware and sensitive of the particular native students they have in their schools (Siksika); make connections with the home (Kainai); be more patient (Kainai); act professionally to ensure confidentiality; be fair with discipline and resolve conflicts with traditional procedures (implies hiring elders who know these forms of practice). Teachers must have more compassion, empathy, sensitivity, and so on because they make a big

difference on the outcomes for students. A meta-analysis study on drop-out and retention reveals the single most important factor contributing to dropout was that at school “no one cared” and for retention it was that some teacher made a student “feel like I was worth it” (Swisher).

It was recognized that there will always be insensitive staff, non-native and native, that our students will meet along their education journeys. So it was deemed essential that all teachers attend workshops and/or take courses on how to deal with native children and their families. Indigenous studies courses must be mandatory in teacher education programs because all people need these courses. This includes our own First Nations staff that never had the opportunity to take courses about our histories. Our own First Nations institutions must be funded to develop both the in-service and cross cultural courses. Up to now the philosophy and worldviews of largely non-native university professors are what influence the perspectives of those who go through these systems. Mainstream institution professionals must be more open-minded and relinquish control over the development of curriculum for First Nations. Among those areas that teachers need to learn more about are: native values and traditions, native child-rearing practices, effects of residential school, terms of the treaties, details of doctrines and international documents that address indigenous rights and contributions of indigenous peoples to today’s world. As well, teachers must understand the negative experiences and systemic racism that impact on First Nations people.

Because of the impact of school personnel on students’ lives, our First Nations demand that First Nations people be recruited for all education positions, especially teaching and other professions. Many of our people feel that demanding a ratio is long overdue. In some U.S. school districts the school staff must reflect the same ratios as the students’ racial backgrounds. Among the examples given for the staff recruitment we demand are:

- More native teachers need to be hired in provincial schools (for example 1 for every 30 students). This was emphatically stated at all community sessions. If the effort to make the curriculum more relevant is genuine, then a concerted effort must be made to recruit native staff. There is a struggle for English-only speakers to teach native concepts.
- More native teacher assistants must be hired because they are a source of meaningful help and hope to native students (Siksika).
- Guidance counselors are needed for native students, especially native guidance counselors who are familiar with the federal system and regulations as well as the culture and language (Siksika).
- Truant officers are needed so that our native truants are not simply referred to the police (Siksika).
- Directors and Department Heads must be hired to design and implement innovations being requested by our people.
- Elder and other community experts must be utilized and compensated fairly for their expert knowledge – establish a salary schedule for these consultants.

When First Nations are hired they must be treated with respect. Several concerns were raised regarding the treatment of current native staff most of whom are teacher assistants or liaison workers. Some of the concerns raised are:

- Many are hired under the native education program and most are usually hired on a year to year basis (no tenures) so there is no job security.
- They do not have access to benefits.
- They do not have access to professional development to enhance their work or to move up on salary scales.
- Many have extremely heavy work loads with many responsibilities all in one ranging from being program and curriculum developers, culture/language teachers with a full schedule, counselors, truant officers, student activity coordinators, disciplinarians, home liaison coordinators, recruitment officers, secretarial and computer assistants, servants to teachers, and so on.
- None receive specialist pay for their expertise in the language and culture.
- None receive bursaries for further studies. The establishment of professional supports must be explored because French Language bursaries exist.
- They are not considered colleagues but subordinates.

The allegations concerning these working conditions must be investigated and corrected immediately. The negative consequences of not addressing them are potential union and legal issues and most of all class control and safety issues.

The process followed to recruit staff was also of concern. Recognized entities such as Parent Committee members, Board members, and education leaders should be involved in short listing, screening and interviewing. Staff should not be hired simply because they are Aboriginal but they must have a critical consciousness of issues and experiences faced by students. Experience has shown that some aboriginal staff do not advocate for students but instead are just as guilty of forcing our students to fit mainstream molds. They advocate for the system rather than our students.

For far too long the hiring of staff, both native and non-native, to work with native students has depended on the Native Project grant. The grant is inconsistent so a more concerted effort must be made to hire native people with tenure. We insist on targeted funding from the Minister's level to address the First Nations staffing requirements.

### ***8. What Have We Gained From Provincial Schools and At What Cost?***

Our communities expressed concerns not only in regards to financial accountability but more importantly also with regard to the outcomes for students attending public schools. Our communities demand to know what the success rates have been for all the years that systems have been delegated responsibility to educate our children and how many of our students the quote to the right describes? Students have ended up back in our communities requiring upgrading to

*“There is an eighteen year old student who has gone through the schools and cannot read. Where does a person go for help to learn to read and how many others are in the same situation?”*

improve their employability and to prepare for further education and training. It was reported that many students get pushed through from grade to grade instead of getting the quality education they deserve. Perhaps a full audit ought to be done on student outcomes so that more attention could be paid to the accountability of provincial schools.

Many of the discussions on accountability were about the funds that provincial school systems have received on behalf of First Nations.

*“... a provincial education authority acknowledged tuition overbillings of about \$700,000 to a First Nation only after an unexpected deficit reported by the First Nation triggered a review” (2000 Report of the Auditor General of Canada).*

Allegations about public funding being misspent are too often pointed in the wrong direction. While it is true that funds are set aside on behalf of First Nations, it is important for all to understand in whose pockets these funds actually end up in and for what returns. Among the critical areas requiring examination

is whether so many of our students have been labeled as special needs because of the extra funds that a jurisdiction would receive. The tuition used to be double for students placed

*“He had asked this question to the provincial school principal and was told that they receive more funds because the Nakoda children were all special needs. Are these children special needs or do they not understand because they don’t understand the language?” (Nakoda)*

in resource rooms. Our community members want to know if targeted funds are actually spent on special needs and how these students have benefited.

The discussions also centered around children who end up back at the band controlled schools in the middle of the school year because of abuse (labeling, discrimination, expulsion and so on). What happens to the funding that the provincial schools have already received for these children (Nakoda)? It is our understanding that the systems that have already accepted tuition monies for students are legally responsible for them for the rest of the year. Why do these funds not follow the students back to First Nations schools and why do the outside systems just wash their hands of these students instead of ensuring that there is some other arrangement for them? We demand that a monitoring and reporting system be in place for what arrangements are made for students and what happens to the funds.

*“We must monitor tuition monies for children who are getting kicked out or who leave because of being picked on.”*

An accounting is requested on what the retention rates are for native students and to identify the problems that contribute to low rates (Siksika). Also required is a report on exactly when these students are dropped from enrollment lists. It is alleged that many students are removed, and surely not by pure coincidence, after the cut-off dates that provincial schools can claim tuition for them. Some schools still collect tuition for the whole year on students that have been out of their systems for months. At minimum a two-count system (end on September and end of February) should be mandated.

An investigation is required on the students that are included on tuition bills submitted by Provincial schools. It was reported that a parent who owned a house off reserve found out that her children were included on the tuition bill submitted to the First Nation. This would be called double dipping. How often do these schools access additional money on behalf of First Nations who are resident in their towns and paying taxes?

The communities demand more accountability on the funds transferred to the provincial schools annually and in particular, they want a biannual review of the tuition agreements so that parents could be informed of any and all developments (Siksika). Financial, program and service accountability is required by all jurisdictions that serve First Nations students in the public systems. When we entrust our members to the provincial schools, we expect them to get the best quality education possible. All of the concerns raised point to a comprehensive evaluation and audit of off-reserve education programs and services offered for our students.

### *School Facilities*

Our community members have major concerns about the vast amounts of money that have been expended for capital construction in provincial schools. Indian Affairs has signed and continues to sign capital agreements with provincial school systems. Agreements have built gymnasiums, shops, home economics facilities and so on. Our communities are frustrated because they believe that provincial schools merely use our children to obtain capital funding. While both the public schools and Indian Affairs expend funds on physical facilities there are no funds in areas that will make long and lasting impacts for our students, such as curriculum development.

Our community members believe that strategies to compensate First Nations for these capital expenditures must be in place. First, because the funds have been expended on our behalf, our people feel they should have outright access to use these facilities and without having to pay extra because we have already paid. Secondly, it is a fact that some schools that have received capital funds no longer enroll our students and furthermore, some schools have closed so the agreements must include clauses to compensate those Nations that end up educating the students. These agreements, up to now, have jeopardized the construction of schools in our own communities because the federal position has been that major expenditures have already been made on behalf of our students. When structures close, our communities feel they have a right to have some say on disposing of these facilities.

In lieu of all the capital funds that have been expended to built facilities in all surrounding communities our First Nations want the province to reciprocate by providing capital funds for construction in our communities especially for our adult and postsecondary programs and institutions?

Our communities want a complete review and report on the status of all agreements that includes not only the facilities but also the issue of land where these facilities were constructed.

### ***9. Promoting Parental Involvement in the Education of First Nation Learners***

Our community members welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the dialogue. Some parents have for too long been made to feel that they do not have the right to ask questions or find out if there are any other options for their children (Nakoda). It was recommended that “seminars be held so that there are healthy interactions between teachers and parents of native children when they are discussing the child’s progress in school (Siksika).” As the quote so aptly points out, real change will only come about when the parents are involved.

*“Parent involvement is the key that opens doors to success – no matter how many meetings, workshops, and conferences, if parents are not involved – then there is really no movement towards better education.” (Tsuu T’ina).*

Among other suggestions to involve parents are:

- Involve parents as volunteers
- Provide parent transportation when needed (Kainai).
- Provide conflict resolution workshops for parents.
- Negotiate Kindergarten to Grade 12 contract with parents to prevent children from falling through the cracks.
- Establish urban/off-reserve Parent Advisory Committees (PAC) that could meet with on reserve PAC’s.
- Offer programs for parents on Parents’ Rights, School Act and other information sharing required to be a better parent to foster and enhance learning and to overcome the past paternalistic policies of governments (Siksika). Preferably our own people should be contracted to develop these modules so that the content is culturally appropriate and reflects our perspectives.
- Establish advocacy services for parents so that they know their issues will be heard and addressed.

There are a lot of home environment issues that cannot be easily addressed by teaching staff; therefore it is imperative that parents are involved in their children’s education and learning.

### ***10. Responsibility and Authority Over Our Own Lives (Jurisdiction)***

It was deemed important by all the nations that we take over the responsibility and authority over our lives, especially education. It was noted also that

*“When are we going to start looking after our affairs instead of listening to white people and government? History has shown that they have betrayed us...we have to have full responsibility and authority over our own lives and affairs” (Piikani).*

because the public school systems have their own agendas, our infrastructure needs for our nations have not been taken into consideration.

Our communities deem it critical to facilitate “Careful examination and continued dialogue on education as a treaty right by researching such documents as ‘*Citizens Plus*’ or the *Red Paper of 1970*” (Siksika). Also required is “Continued education and dialogue on the history of the development of sovereignty issues in education such as the Doctrine of Discovery, colonialism and various legislation concerning indigenous people” (Siksika).

If we had full jurisdiction and authority we could, “Institute measures to ensure quality of education for reserve school systems so students can start and finish their education on the reserve. This will foster a respect, pride and ownership of education” (Siksika). These measures would include but not be limited to:

- Ensuring that teachers and other school personnel are culturally sensitive and that they contribute positively to the overall atmosphere of a culturally based school system. Ways to accomplish this would be to hire speakers from the nations and adequately compensate them (Siksika) for their specialized knowledge.
- Resourcing our First Nations colleges to develop programs of study in the history, culture and language of our peoples.
- Implementing programs and policies to train more native teachers for post-secondary administration and instruction (Siksika).
- Developing more curriculum resources that are culture and language based for all levels of education – Kindergarten to University (Siksika).
- Establishing a Board of Education that includes more parent representatives from all the schools – on and off the reserve (Siksika).
- Including our community experts such as elders in a meaningful way in the education system and not just as token representatives (Siksika). This includes fair compensation for their expertise.
- Making sincere efforts to promote healing so that success can be a reality. The continuing effects of the residential schools, chemical abuse and cultural alienation are contributors to present day breakdowns of families and other relationships.
- Removing artificial boundaries for on and off reserve programs and services because our Treaty rights are portable. This would include, for example, covering the cost of books and supplies for our off-reserve students (Kainai).
- Ensuring that tuition agreements address all the needs of students. For the First Nations who do not negotiate their own tuition agreements, it is suggested that perhaps these should come back for the people to vote on because the current agreements do not seem to be serving the people (Tsuu T’ina).

With regard to having a voice in off-reserve schools this is practically non-existent. Even though some First Nation members sit on public boards their powers are severely limited. Our First Nation parents often feel a sense of alienation because their comments are often not acknowledged.

While our people believe full membership on provincial school boards is a must, they demand that the First Nation members of the board be treated with respect by other board members. Second, our communities want control over who acts in a representative capacity. Representatives must be elected according to whatever process is deemed appropriate by First Nations and not “handpicked” by the public system.

Our communities request a joint Treaty 7 process be created to address jurisdiction and authority issues because, regardless of First Nation, all Nations, up to now, are impacted by regulations, laws and legislation that are made by entities outside of our own systems of government (Tsuu T’ina). Our own nations must have on-going discussions on jurisdiction and authority and examine all areas of education. All of our communities said that “the discussions have just now begun” and because we have never had the opportunity for true local control we need to have these discussions to advise our leaders what to negotiate for. The roles and responsibilities of all levels of government are badly in need of clarification. Only after First Nations within Treaty 7 have thoroughly examined all areas such as school and program accreditation, program and accreditation standards, teacher education and certification, authorized texts and resources, tuition fees and so on, can we discuss these areas with the federal and provincial governments. We firmly believe both the federal and provincial governments have a vested interest in supporting the Treaty 7 First Nations to have these important discussions. The status quo of merely “operating” our systems according to someone else’s laws and regulations, albeit control at arms length, must be over-hauled.

The controls imposed by other entities outside of government and that impact on the education of our students must be explored as well. For example, we may make certain demands of governments but are the bureaucrats in a position to respond to our recommendations. Are there forces such as powerful unions that dictate staffing recruitment practices, working conditions and so on? How do we deal with these entities that exercise authorities that may counter what is in the best interests of our children?

Other governments must respect the First Nations education authorities that exist. Too often personnel are hired to supposedly represent us when they do not even have official connections to our communities or leaders. It would be considered ludicrous for us to hire just any non-native person to be a spokesperson for non-native people so why is it okay for outside governments to select our “ambassadors?”

### ***11. Better Response to First Nations with Schools Under First Nations Control***

With whatever authority our First Nations have been able to exercise, many of our systems are building exemplary programs. One of the on-going drawbacks is the lack of adequate funding and resources. Public schools are eligible for grants and resources over and above what First Nations schools receive, for example, Native Education funding is available to off-reserve schools (Kainai). We all know that the wealth of the province does not strictly come from income taxes. Much of the revenue comes from natural resources that we currently have a claim to and furthermore we pay many of the fees and

hidden taxes that other Albertans pay. First Nations schools should be eligible for all the extra resources that public schools get.

Provincial  
Education  
Departments

*“Education for us is the responsibility of the federal government that’s why we don’t approach the provinces to get resources. However we do pay taxes into the provinces contrary to what many times is thrown at us that we do not. We pay GST, fees, licenses, hidden taxes, etc. We are Albertans. We should not be short-changed. We should have a voice but we don’t” (Kainai).*

have funded curriculum projects but often not under the control of Nation members who have direct access to the holders of important information. Another issue relates to the scope of curriculum activity being supported. While the need to preserve languages is getting some attention in the public schools, other areas of need are not being addressed nor is their significance understood. For example at Kainai the need for children to learn clan songs is an area that is deemed important. The implications for research and recordings are enormous but this work would not be considered a priority by outside entities and actually it would not be appropriate for outsiders to conduct the research so our people must be supported to undertake the work required.

It is easier for First Nations controlled schools to base their actions on appropriate cultural protocol, for example, nation members are able to say, “Too often we react with our emotions such as resentment. We need to dig into our culture when we are considering our actions” (Kainai). Off reserve schools would experience difficulty knowing “what culture” to consider before taking action.

First Nations schools have creatively offered alternative methods of delivery. For example, in regards to language, “Immersion is the only way we will save our language and we are doing this” (Kainai). Furthermore, schools under our control can more readily respond to requests provided the resources are there. For example, the request that each of the subject areas include cultural teachings and that “the different cultural components be introduced through hands on experiential learning” (Tsuu T’ina) can more easily be arranged. The hands on learning involves cultural and environmental excursions outside of the classroom and the First Nations schools under tribal control are better able to schedule around community events, ceremonies and so on.

First Nations Schools have a better opportunity to work more closely with other agencies to address the holistic needs of students e.g. some have social workers in the schools. These networking initiatives are intended to create a safer better community through our schools (Kainai).

Because the First Nations schools are able to respond better to community needs some parents are advocating the establishment of First Nations Schools in the city. Many of our students are not in the cities by choice so they lose out on the efforts made to address our needs. The establishment of city schools totally under the control of First Nations but fully funded by the province warrants further study and action. Even if we do not end up with an off reserve school under our control our members are demanding similar

innovative programs such as immersion in those schools. These exemplary programs must be staffed by our people and under their control.

Instead of working cooperatively with our jurisdictions off reserve schools compete with us for the same students as is expressed in the quote. It is perceived that the public schools

*“At one time the neighboring communities had posted advertisements in the local newspaper inviting the children from the reserve to attend their local schools. We believe that these schools may have only been interested in the funding they receive when our children attend their schools” (Nakoda).*

attempt to attract our students by negatively labeling our schools just to compete for student numbers and the tuition fees that they bring in.

The community members encouraged our First Nations Education departments to forge ahead and continue to improve our own systems. The following were suggested:

- Investigate year round schooling (Siksika).
- Offer more technology courses related to trades careers (Siksika).
- Make non-academic schooling more job-oriented (Siksika).
- Establish a Central Tribal Resource Centre to make better use of time (Kainai).
- Furnish a study place for students (Kainai).
- Offer more activities for students (Kainai).
- Teach language in an integrated fashion it cannot be taught in isolation. (Tsuu T’ina).

One of the reasons for this review according to Alberta Learning information packages is that “despite the well-intentioned efforts of federal, provincial and First Nations governments the socio-economic conditions ...have not significantly improved.” One logical explanation is that the funds earmarked to solve the problems often become make-work projects for non-native professionals. Whenever “Aboriginal funds” are announced, individuals and institutions lineup for a piece of the pie. First Nations are usually not eligible to apply or in the recent past are eligible only if they “partner” with outside institutions or agencies.

Our First Nations education leaders are better able to address student and community needs and offer better opportunities for students. We must be trusted with doing our own research, designing our own programs and implementing our own programs. In other words, education and our schools with adequate funding must be truly under our control. Perhaps then we will begin to see dramatic improvements.

## ***B. Post-Secondary Information from Community Meetings***

### ***1. Reinforcing Dreams***

Education should be about making dreams come true. Unfortunately, our community members told us that in the public school system many of our children learn to lessen their expectations and abandon their dreams. A person from Kainai spoke generally of a public school system that “limits our students’ abilities. They tell parents that their child will not be able to graduate but

they end up graduating from our reserve high school **and** university.” Surrounded by such negative attributions about their personal “potential” in a world of high unemployment on our reserves, our children struggle to hold onto their dreams. In this section, we discuss how we can

*“Educators need to open the children’s minds to the possibility of them becoming doctors, lawyers, nurses, accountants, business executives, teachers, etc. [They must] find ways to show them what these positions are about, make them seem both rewarding and possible for them to achieve. They could be encouraged even to go into business for themselves. They should feel there are no limits on them. They should be encouraged to “reach for the stars.” (Tsuu T’ina)*

help prepare our children for their post-secondary pursuits, whether they occur on or off our reserves. Our community members offer many suggestions regarding how to ease our children’s transition from reserve to city life, if they must (or choose to) relocate to further their education. In addition, we identify areas of funding which our members feel prove insufficient to meet student needs and draw attention to the support services required to enhance our students’ capacity to successfully complete their studies. We pay particular attention to discussions revolving around the need to have our education reflect our culture and language and how important having our own First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions is to maintaining our cultural identity and political autonomy. Finally, in order to enhance our people’s ability to achieve their dreams, we must strengthen the link between education and employment; we must be given the chance to pursue their career(s) of choice in a positive and progressive job market.

### ***2. First Things First: Creating a Solid Foundation For Furthering Education***

There are many ways to help students prepare for entry into post-secondary education. First and foremost, “We must begin with quality education in band controlled schools so the students can develop the skills and knowledge that is needed for them to attend post-secondary institutions” (Nakoda). Throughout the process of educating our children whether it be “In day care, Head Start, school, or adult upgrading, all courses should have our Blackfoot language and culture taught” (Piikani). Community members firmly believe “Elders should be involved in the classrooms from Head Start to post-secondary education. They know best about our history. They are valuable resources” (Piikani).

In addition to having our culture taught by respected Elders at all levels so that First Nation values, belief systems, history and wisdom are passed from generation to generation, we must be certain that our children have the fundamental skills to enable

them to successfully complete their studies. In Kainai, community members requested a literacy program be created, indicating, to some extent, inadequacies in the current public school system in which many of our population fail to be taught reading and writing skills.

Our people also need an opportunity to explore their career options (Piikani). Suggestions include offering career counseling at the middle school and high school level so that our children can formulate a career plan early and take courses which will enable them to fulfil their career goals. Having a career day would also stimulate student interest. Some suggest that greater emphasis be placed on entering vocational and technical institutes rather than maintaining the present narrow focus on universities and colleges.

### **3. Bridging Two Worlds: Preparing for the Move from Reserve to City**

Not only does our student population have to successfully meet the challenge of increasingly difficult academic pursuits, but they must also resolve any personal,

*Moving to the city has its problems – rent, need more money, prejudice, often don't want to rent to Indians. As parents, we have to pay for our children's education, textbooks, etc. Say Child tax is supposed to cover our children's expenses. Even that is not enough, especially to let our children in extra curriculum events like hockey, baseball, swimming, etc. It is very costly. As a result, we have to move back to the reserve. At least we don't have to dish out extra money for our children's education and our children can participate in the few sports that there are on the reserve. The city has a lot to offer, but it is costly (Piikani).*

financial and cultural challenges they face. It is the unfortunate reality that many of our children are forced to relocate to urban centres for post-secondary. Our people had many stories of students who encountered various obstacles in the city and who experienced culture shock. The comment to the left presents many of the

barriers to a student's ability to make the transition. They offered many ideas about how to ease the transition and to address some of the systemic problems our students have to deal with.

To facilitate a student's transition from reserve to urban life, it is important to make sure that the student has adequate finances and is able to effectively budget them. Currently students find it difficult to cover the costs associated with moving (e.g., cover damage deposits, purchase start-up supplies and furniture). Students must receive enough funding to meet their basic needs. At Kainai, people suggested a money management course be offered to new students.

Issues of prejudice must also be addressed. Many of our members find it difficult to locate affordable accommodation due to landlords who discriminate against them because of their race and/or because they have dependents. Our people demand that landlords be held accountable. They also recommended that reserves advertise list of housing, and post names of people looking for roommates. Students should also be aware of their rights as identified in existing legislation.

To combat these and other issues, people from the various Nations suggested that students be given survival skills for city life. Reserves should offer preparatory workshops or “bridging programs” for those students entering post-secondary institutions for the first time. Not only should these teach skills, but also they should reinforce the need for students to establish a support system in the city. First Nation students should be encouraged to assist each other as much as possible. Such “bridging programs” could also be offered at the urban university or college for credit. In addition, interagency organizations can be established within urban centres to help First Nation students resolve difficulties that arise.

#### ***4. Financial Assistance***

Many of our people struggle to make ends meet while they undertake their post-secondary studies. Most rely on Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) to cover their basic needs. However, as community members pointed out, many students live below the poverty line. Our people stressed the need to improve funding levels for this program to accommodate the real cost of living. In part, the federal government could reduce high rental costs and remove some of the discrimination against our student population by providing affordable housing to First Nation students attending post-secondary institutions in the city. Alternatively, Nations within Treaty 7 could join together to provide First Nation controlled student housing to their members.

Community members also requested that support be allocated to help students cover the costs incurred by students related to their studies. These include the cost of photocopying or faxing documents, for example. As the comment to the right suggests, many of our people also stressed the need to cover the costs of our post-secondary students living off-reserve who have school-aged children.

*School supplies should be made available to all off-reserve students as they are presently available to on-reserve students... This includes transportation costs (Siksika).*

In addition to covering the costs incurred by students, our populations also recommended proactive measures be taken. We should provide more financial incentives (such as scholarships and grants) for high grades and/or program completion. At a macro level, we should also lend financial support for Native Student Associations at various post-secondary institutions, thereby providing a place for First Nation students to come together in friendship and/or to have a unified voice to address concerns.

#### ***5. Student Support Services***

Students need more than simple financial assistance to enable them to enroll and successfully complete their post-secondary programs; they must also receive physical, psychological, social support and political support.

Let’s start with the fundamentals: students need a place to live, a way to get to and from school and they need a safe place for their children while they attend classes. We’ve

already identified a need for affordable student housing both on and off reserve and highlighted the possibility of having these apartment buildings band-controlled. Our people also stressed the need to provide transportation for adult students attending community higher learning centres. Transportation could take the form of bussing, of a “student run,” “shuttle service” or even be as basic as arranging car pools. We must also consider the feasibility of including transportation for children to day care facilities when their parents also require busing. We need affordable day care for students with children, including those registered in evening courses.

Students also require access to computer technology, including the Internet, in order to complete assignments efficiently. Some people suggest each student attending post-secondary be given a computer. Others suggest that a First Nation Student Centre could offer access to computer, Internet and faxing facilities. This Centre could also act as a meeting place, offer recreational activities and be inclusive of the students’ families and communities.

In terms of psychosocial support, numerous suggestions to enhance student welfare were introduced during our community meetings. Our members recommend that more Elders be hired in college and university settings as mentors, student helpers and guides. They also indicated a need for more Native tutors and counselors as well as a Native Education Counseling Centre. In fact, First Nations need various role models in key positions within the educational system.

Political support could take many forms. Students require advocates to assist them with any problems they encounter. Any one who the student trusted, including Elders from a student’s reserve, staff from their Post-secondary Student Support Program or a member of the student’s Chief and Council could take the role of advocate. A Native Student Association would facilitate interactions between First Nations and act as a strong voice for its members as could a student newspaper/newsletter devoted to their issues and upcoming events.

## ***6. Demanding an Education which Honors Our Culture***

Much of our discussions at community meetings revolved around the importance of providing our children with an education that reflected our culture, language, knowledge

*“Develop a screening process for teachers who will be teaching in a cross-cultural environment. Native values should not be sacrificed or deemed useless by ethnocentric non-native teachers. At present, it is ‘learn-as-you-go’ at the expense of Native values and culture. This is covert racism and frustrates the self-esteem of native students. It is also very hard to prove” (Siksika).*

and history. They argued that staff and instructors from public institutions need more cross-cultural education and need to be sensitized to our culture and to avoid teaching from the ethnocentric viewpoint described in the

comment at the left. In direct contrast, people demanded that post-secondary institutes “Switch the curriculum to truly reflect the culture of the community.” (Kainai)

## **7. *Aboriginal Postsecondary Institutes: Furthering our Education at Home***

Many of the concerns our people had around maintaining our culture and language within the education system could be alleviated by having our own Nation-controlled postsecondary institutions that were directly accountable to our own people. Our people view control over the provision of all levels of education to our members as a very important step with regard to maintaining our Treaty rights and our recognition as sovereign Nations.

*Many of our people are educated in the colleges and universities. These professional Natives were encouraged to lose their culture and language. We must protect our Treaty rights by encouraging and reinforcing our culture and language to the young people (Nakoda).*

As well as providing instruction and educational services to our own members, our First Nation controlled institutes have the expertise available to design and develop our own curriculum, textbooks and programs. These courses could be offered to First Nations and non-First Nations alike. They could also be brokered to other post-secondary institutions. All we need is accreditation through the First Nations accreditation board currently being established across Canada and the funding to cover their costs of development. Our people advise us to seek funding from a variety of sources, including the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, through corporate donations, increased access to provincial grants, and from overseas countries such as Germany.

Our people stressed the need to teach empathy and tolerance regardless of how or where instruction occurs. Some take a pragmatic stance, indicating that “If our children are heading to university or colleges, we need to teach them to get along with the people in Calgary – so they can succeed in school and be able to succeed in doing business

*We must take the things that are good from both our culture and the mainstream society and learn both. Only then will we have the skills and knowledge to survive in both worlds and be successful (Nakoda).*

with them. Racial hatred is a deterrent to learning and succeeding in business” (Tsuu T’ina).

## **8. *Making Dreams a Reality: Linking Education with Employment***

In order for dreams to come true, our people must first be inspired and given confidence that they can achieve their dreams. For the most part, we have devoted our attention to those of our people who are about to enter or who are enrolled in post-secondary studies. However, we must also attract our youth who have not been inspired by their education thus far, who have not sought out advanced degrees and who are currently unemployed. According to some of our people, this group in particular needs our support and encouragement to succeed in life.

*We need to focus on people in the 18 to 25 year old category. What is there for them? They are singles who are expected to live on \$229.00 a month (on social assistance). There are no jobs, no schooling and nothing for them to do (Piikani).*

While advanced education gives our people some of the skills and knowledge they need to make their dreams a reality, the world around them must be welcoming of their ideas and inspiration. Unfortunately, given high unemployment rates on the reserve many of our children's dreams remain unrealized. Even those who earn advanced degrees may find themselves with few, if any, employment offers at home.

*A lot of people take a course and then there is no work; they have wasted this training (Piikani).*

Economic development must occur at the reserve level if our graduates are to return

*home. "Our tribe needs to do a "big plan" for the future for how we are going to absorb the hundreds of graduates who are going to be getting educated and who will need and want jobs when they finish." (Kainai) We need to have human resource planning for graduates built-in. This means we should encourage our people to enter careers where we have identified shortfalls within our communities. We should offer placement programs while students are still in post-secondary. We need to ensure that our graduates gain the skills they need to work with our people and, more importantly, that they retain their traditional values to guide their efforts. For our people, education is not an individual pursuit; it is a communal one. That perspective is clear in the statement we leave you with:*

*It is not enough for our graduates to have their outside knowledge. They also need to have community knowledge to do a proper job (Kainai).*

*"What can our post-secondary graduates do, or what can they look forward to, to contribute to our community when they graduate? [We have] 300 to 400 graduates. Is there a place for them on the reserve or do we force them to find a job on the outside? In the past, if we asked a child to go and find out what is happening, where our adversaries were, where the buffalo were, where we camp, they would go look out and if they didn't return then there was something wrong. They didn't come back with the information we needed to survive." [But today, we are telling our graduates who have knowledge and skills we need as a community,] "Go live on the outside. We don't need your services." [This is not right. Instead we must return to our traditional ways and welcome our people back. We must reinforce the need for them to return.] "You are going far to go to school. Your education will not only benefit yourself, but your community, your relatives, and neighbours will benefit. You will teach what you know from the outside" (Kainai).*

### ***C. Strengthening Partnerships Between First Nation School Jurisdictions, Post-Secondary Institutions, Apprenticeship Providers, Vocational and Technical Schools, Industry and Government.***

For far too long no credence is given to our experiences, our knowledge and traditions and our ability to determine what is best for us. In this paper our people have poured out their frustrations and expressed how they want an opportunity to fully control their own programs with adequate resourcing. In this scenario we do the designing and we would turn to our partners as the needs arise. From our recent experiences "partnership" has

only meant that someone will tap into “aboriginal” resources and then programs will be designed for us. We will be involved by being invited to sit on advisory committees. This is not good enough anymore because the same systemic racism does not disappear. When we give advice, our narratives that are supposed to provide the necessary context are considered a waste of executives’ valuable time. These partnerships will work only if the non-native partners want a genuine relationship that respects our perspectives and approaches. Up to now all the rules followed are the outsider’s approaches to business and our dialogue is therefore considered frivolous. The understanding will start when the communicative approaches used by our people are accepted. Often personal experiences and stories will be told to enrich the recommendations to be made for specific groups. Our partners do not have the time to listen and therefore be informed of our unique realities. The result is that inappropriate and “pan-Indian” models are thrust down our throats. Models are imported because they worked somewhere else.

Healthy partnerships will be established when our people’s talents and abilities are recognized and when our people hold managerial positions in government and industry. Pride in self and in the community will be enhanced when our people assume positions in schools, corporations and government. These appointments will send a powerful message that our members’ talents and abilities are recognized (Kainai).

Related to this at a macro level is the recognition of our tribal institutions by governments, mainstream institutions, agencies and businesses. For too long outside entities are funded to develop programs that would address our tribal needs while our own institutions struggle to obtain resources to design and implement their programs. Our First Nations institutions should be contracted to design and develop materials and programs. Mainstream institutions could then broker modules, courses and programs from our institutions.

The member institutions of the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC), all Alberta based at the moment, have blazed the trail for national postsecondary initiatives and their accomplishments have been achieved on shoestring budgets. Just think of the exciting innovations that could emerge if governments and industry supported these initiatives financially and in an advisory capacity when requested. The Alberta example could be the springboard to changing the ranking of First Nations on-reserve quality of life (UN ranking System) from being 63rd on the list to being first right beside other Canadians.

Our own institutions in spite of not being core funded have been able to provide a wide array of programs and services. However, the successful track record of these institutions is not being recognized or legitimized to the extent possible. Federal and provincial funding programs, especially Human Resources and Development, exclude these institutions for eligibility for all kinds of reasons ranging from: your programs are not accredited, you are under federal responsibility, you are not a public institution of the province, and so on. Other provinces have been more responsive to supporting the institutes evolving in their area. Legislation is required which recognizes our institutions as public institutions of our First Nations, recognizes our own accreditation processes for

institutions and programs, recognizes our eligibility for funding and thus requires all departments to earmark funds for our institutions and so on. The U.S. President's Order in Council is attached as a reference for what is possible.

The gate keeping function of the province has not served our nations to meet their own education requirements for becoming economically self-reliant. Recommendations of various federal and provincial reports and studies have not been implemented. As recently as April 2000 the Auditor General of Canada notes that "...the progress in closing the education gap for Indian students living on reserves has been unacceptably slow. At the current rate of progress, it will take over twenty years for them to reach parity in academic achievement with other Canadians". It is only after our First Nations started directing programs that we have seen an improvement in graduation rates. Many of those that have attended our own institutions are succeeding and taking on key roles with our tribal administrations. If "our partners" trusted us we would make more of an impact.

It is often not the choice of students to be in off-reserve school systems but their parents are employed off- reserve or are in mainstream postsecondary institutions. Arrangements should be made for these students to attend First Nations schools if they wish. This would mean that public school systems would pay the tuition to First Nations systems for these "residents" in their jurisdictions. It was also noted that there are instances whereby some of our non-native neighbors may wish to attend our schools. In these instances tuition fees would be worked out and busing arrangements made. It is not far fetched for non-natives to attend our schools to be immersed in our language and culture. What better way is there for people to gain an understanding of the first peoples of our land? When people wish to be immersed in another language and culture, they go on exchanges to the country of origin so why couldn't students come to study at our First Nations?

If students off reserve do not attend First Nations schools, for whatever reason, strategies must be put in place to enhance their chances for success. Liaison amongst jurisdictions must be established to help better serve student needs (Kainai). More concerted efforts must be made by mainstream schools and institutions to invite Tribal leaders to functions involving their nations students, such as graduations. This presence by our leaders will contribute to the students' sense of worth.

Regular opportunities for exchanges should be arranged for teachers and students, for urban and reserve students and so on (Kainai). Exchanges between urban and reserve Parent Advisory Groups should also be arranged.

Companies need to take on apprentices for the trades (Tsuu T'ina). Corporations and professional offices need to be more responsive to taking on interns to introduce students that might not otherwise have opportunities to gain exposure and experience in different fields.

All of our communities stated that the community dialogue that has commenced at the Nation level is to be viewed as a beginning of such discussions. They want all of our people, from our elders to our youth to participate in the dialogue and to hear the information that is being exchanged. It is considered very important for all our people to understand our old ways and to know what is happening today.

*“We should not limit our discussion of this information to meet the goals and deadlines of this review. Now that we have started we have to continue bringing the message across. This will strengthen our people again” (Piikani).*

The process followed in the Treaty Seven communities was considered a very powerful process. “It gave people a chance to discuss things that are painful; it is starting to give voice and to share experiences. Many of our people had just stopped talking because no one was listening.

Many recommendations were expressed throughout these sessions and these are summarized in the following section as per the key theme areas presented in this paper.

## ***V. Recommendations and Conclusions***

Throughout the community dialogues our First Nations members articulated recommendations that would bring about the quality of programs and services they envisioned for their children. Some of these are presented under the key theme areas that have been presented; other are to be gleaned from a thorough reading of this document. Although the list may appear overwhelming, it demonstrates that there are a vast number of issues to be addressed. Because our communities told us that they consider the meetings as a beginning of many rounds of discussions, we could not presume to make specific recommendations on their behalf. This draft must be discussed in greater depth at another round of meetings to generate the more specific recommendations.

We hope that this initial list of recommendations does not tempt our partners to ignore the main document that provides the context for this list.

### ***Improving First Nations learner success in ECS to Grade 12***

#### ***1. Meaningful and Quality Education - Curriculum***

- 1.1 Ensure that methods of delivery are appropriate: urge that our languages, cultures, and histories be taught in an integrated fashion and offer the language and culture in a sequential manner to avoid boredom and repetition.

- 1.2 Ensure that program content is appropriate: Offer programs to preserve values (showing compassion, listening to our elders more, showing respect for others, putting our children first, and so on).
- 1.3 Reverse the trend from Blackfoot to English to Blackfoot;
- 1.4 Develop programs for youth and teenagers
- 1.5 Take our tribal infrastructure needs into consideration to prepare them for the needs of the nation and institutions. Ensure a fit between community needs and education. Not enough for our graduates to have outside knowledge. They also need to have community knowledge to do a proper job (offer Language, culture and history to bring order and responsibility back).
- 1.6 Examine issue of second language requirements; if students speak their first language, then the second language requirement should be waived.
- 1.7 Teach useful and appropriate course such as Lifeskills courses including money and credit management.
- 1.8 Recognize the labor market and thus training needs of First Nations and allow us to determine what programs to fund (no interference on duration and source of training). HRDC currently dictates what is eligible for funding.

## ***2. Foster A Greater Appreciation And Understanding By All Albertans Of First Nation People.***

- 2.1 Arrange Professional Development for all staff (new and continuing)
- 2.2 Make cultural exchanges for staff and students mandatory.
- 2.3 Make cross-cultural courses mandatory for all staff.
- 2.4 Organize “Healing circles” for both native and non-native students to curb racial intolerance.
- 2.5 Develop a screening process for teachers who will be teaching.

## ***3. Learning Resources and Technologies***

- 3.1 Allow First Nations students equal access to use of all facilities and do not assess extra fees. Tuition that First Nations pay on behalf of their students covers all costs to educate a child
- 3.2 Make arrangements to ensure that students are able to access public libraries without excessive non-resident costs to use this additional resource.
- 3.3 Integrate cultural content into the curriculum in a sequential manner
- 3.4 Use relevant textbooks with native content
- 3.5 Provide more funds to develop curriculum on our languages, cultures and histories under First Nations' control.
- 3.6 Protect our intellectual property rights and have our First Nations hold copyright to materials produced.
- 3.7 Put a process in place to permit Nation members to give the consent for the use of our information
- 3.8 Give First Nations a voice on censorship of inappropriate or racist materials.

- 3.9 Provide redress for earlier exploitation of our peoples' knowledge; repatriate copyright for resources that contain First Nations information.

#### ***4. Aim for Accuracy and Advocacy With Assessments***

- 4.1 Stop federal funding based on labeling – schedule appropriate and updated assessment of native students to ensure they are in classes where they can reach their potential and are challenged
- 4.2 Use assessments to advocate for students and to offer them meaningful assistance.
- 4.3 Use a variety of components to assess students' achievement.
- 4.4 Pay attention to basics and remediate as soon as possible.
- 4.5 Know the strengths and weaknesses of all students.
- 4.6 Pay attention to student maturity and readiness before moving them on.
- 4.7 Teach at child's pace.
- 4.8 Do not falsely advance students (i.e. no social promotions).
- 4.9 Pay attention to self-esteem building because of identity issues.
- 4.10 Hire in-class assistants/counselors to interpret feelings.
- 4.11 Pinpoint trouble areas and arrange for early intervention programs.
- 4.12 Put policy in place to prevent misuse and abuse of any drugs.
- 4.13 Hold inquiry is on the current administration of drugs especially to address concerns about Ritalin?

#### ***5. Loving all of Our Children Especially Those With Special Needs***

- 5.1 Plan alternatives for our children who are not having problems (i.e. gifted school programs).
- 5.2 Assist First Nations schools to access badly needed resources for special needs programs and services.
- 5.3 I.O.P programs should be eliminated as they are used to separate native students from non-native students in the provincial systems.
- 5.4 Develop more programs for special needs children and not just isolate from other students.
- 5.5 Construct special center to address speech, hearing and other physical needs close to the community and families so they do not have to relocate.
- 5.6 Examine and implement programs for high school special needs students.
- 5.7 Ensure teachers are specialized in Special Education.
- 5.8 Sensitize teachers to special needs of students especially those with FAS and FAE.
- 5.9 Develop and enforce rules to prevent abuse of these students by other students and staff.
- 5.10 Organize support programs for parents, students and school personnel to promote a healthy and safe environment for special needs students.
- 5.11 Learn from exceptional strategies, for example, KBE is modeling “kimmapiipitsini” or “compassion” by trying its best to meet the needs of the disabled and FAS students.

## **6. *Learner Supports: e.g. counseling, tutors***

- 6.1 Offer a blend of counseling, learning and support to students.
- 6.2 Put strategies in place to raise critical consciousness to eliminate systemic racism.
- 6.3 Address bullying before it gets out of hand.
- 6.4 Work with other agencies (foster inter-agency networking).
- 6.5 Establish support groups for all ages of students
- 6.6 Address social issues and offer intervention and prevention programs: e.g. teach teen violence prevention, hold workshops on teen pregnancies.
- 6.7 Update the curriculum to address Fetal alcohol syndrome and other disorders.

Some of the academic supports are to:

- 6.1 Publicize all scholarships available to students
- 6.2 Establish a plan for access to computers and other learning resources.
- 6.3 Make after school tutoring programs accessible. Tutoring should be made available regardless of grade; arrange during school hours where transportation is a problem
- 6.4 Provide guidance to junior and senior high school students on the routes available to them and how to meet the requirements.
- 6.5 Provide guidance on college and university preparation.
- 6.6 Offer literacy programs for elementary and high school students (ESL).
- 6.7 Have school supplies (and other services) available to all off-reserve students as they are presently available to on-reserve students.

## **7. *Basic Needs – e.g. daycare, transportation***

- 7.1 Establish day care for students who need it.
- 7.2 Establish transportation for off-reserve students to reserve schools.
- 7.3 Establish meal programs (Breakfast and lunch) for students.
- 7.4 Identify ways and means to enable native students to participate in extra-curricular activities (e.g. arrange transportation to and from events).
- 7.5 Offer treaty Indian students the same benefits as on reserve (books and supplies, transportation, and so on).

## **8. *Personnel Who will Provide Genuine Help and Hope***

- 8.1 Hire more First Nations people for all education positions, especially teachers and other professionals.
- 8.2 Implement staff/student ratio that reflects the number of First Nations students (1 First Nation teacher for every 30 students)
- 8.3 Hire more native teacher assistants for a source of meaningful help and hope to native students

- 8.4 Hire native guidance counselors who are familiar culture and language and all federal system and regulations that impact on students
- 8.5 Hire truant officers not just to refer truants to the police but to address factors impacting on attendance.
- 8.6 Investigate and correct all allegations about working conditions for current native staff hired under Native Education project:
  - Offer tenure and job security
  - Offer access to benefits
  - Offer access to professional development to enhance their work or to move up on salary scales.
  - Assign reasonable workloads and compensate fairly for duties performed
  - Pay specialist pay for their expertise in the language and culture
  - Establish bursaries for further studies
  - Support them to attend workshops and classes on language and culture
  - Treat staff as colleagues and not as subordinates.
- 8.7 Make cultural awareness training mandatory for all staff, native and non-native, through workshops or courses to enhance understanding: of native values and traditions, traditional child-rearing practices, effects of residential school, terms of treaties, knowledge of other instruments relating to indigenous people's rights
- 8.8 Put in place a firm plan of action to address intolerable actions/behaviors/racist attitudes. Expectations as a minimum are: to make connections with the home; be more patient, shed racist attitudes; act professionally to ensure confidentiality; have more compassion, empathy, sensitivity make students feel like they are worth it
- 8.9 Ensure fairness with discipline (e.g. hold instigators of the abuse, verbal and otherwise, responsible for initiating student conflicts).
- 8.10 Have conflicts resolved with traditional procedures (implies hiring elders who know these forms of practice).
- 8.11 Establish targeted funding from the Ministerial level to address the First Nations staffing and program requirements.

## ***9. Accountability by Provincial Schools***

- 9.1 Update and disclose database on the success rates for all these years that provincial systems have taken our students. Too many students have ended up back in our communities without employment skills and lacking the academic or literacy background to further their studies
- 9.2 Evaluate programs and services to ensure all allegations in this report are corrected: stop social promotions and short changing students
- 9.3 Investigate the retention rates for native students and identify the school factors that contribute to low rates and plan strategies for radical change
- 9.4 Establish a formal reporting process on tuition agreements (e.g. review on a biannual basis to inform parents of any and all developments)
- 9.5 Compare funding between provincial schools and band controlled schools to educate our children especially special education
- 9.6 Examine how and why so many of our students have been labeled as special needs.

- 9.7 Audit and report how funds designated for special needs have been spent.
- 9.8 Audit and report how special needs students have benefited.
- 9.9 Account for what happens to the funding that the provincial schools have already received for children who are expelled or leave because of intolerable treatment; it is our understanding that the systems that have already accepted tuition monies for students are legally responsible for them. School jurisdictions should be held legally responsible for the education of these students.
- 9.10 Ensure that systems do not just wash their hands of students who are “pushed out” of the system – they have an obligation to make alternative arrangements for their education (e.g. transfers funds to First Nations or arrange for home schooling ensuring adequate learning resources are available).
- 9.11 Establish a monitoring system on tuition bills to ensure there is no double dipping – if First Nations are resident in counties, then they should not be included on tuition lists.
- 9.12 Set the record straight for off-reserve funding so that all groups know exactly how and where the funds are spent.

## ***10. School Facilities***

- 10.1 Disclose a full report on the status of capital agreements.
- 10.2 Clarify what the arrangements are if these schools close e.g. What compensation is there for First Nations and what say do we have for disposing of these facilities?
- 10.3 Provide capital grants for First Nations to build their facilities (redress for jeopardizing construction in First Nations communities).
- 10.4 Allow outright access to use these provincial facilities without extra pay because we have already paid.
- 10.5 Disclose full report on the issue of land where these facilities were constructed.
- 10.6 Provide capital grants for adult postsecondary programs and institutions

## ***11. Recognize And Increase Parent Involvement In The Education Of First Nation Learners***

- 11.1 Provide parent transportation when needed.
- 11.2 Provide conflict resolution workshops for parents.
- 11.3 Provide k-12 contract with parents to prevent children from falling through the cracks.
- 11.4 Establish urban Parent Advisory Committees (PAC) that could meet with on reserve PAC’s.
- 11.5 Organize seminars to foster healthy interactions between teachers and parents of native children when they are discussing the child’s progress in school.
- 11.6 Establish Parent Advisory Groups with a native representative from each school on the county board.

- 11.7 Fund our nations to host programs for parents on Parents' Rights, School Act and other information required to overcome the past paternalistic policies of governments.

## ***12. Jurisdiction and Authority Over Our Own Lives (Includes Schools Under our Control)***

- 12.1 Support the infrastructure needs of our nations.
- 12.2 Provide resources for our nations for on-going discussions to clarify jurisdiction and authority roles of tribal, federal, and provincial governments
- 12.3 Support First Nations careful examination and continued dialogue on education as a treaty right so that everyone understands the significance of the treaties.
- 12.4 Support our nations to host continued education and dialogue on the history of the development of sovereignty issues in education such as the Doctrine of Discovery, colonialism and various legislation, concerning indigenous people.
- 12.5 Foster a respect, pride and ownership of education by First Nations. This includes but is not limited to: designing culturally based school systems, hiring speakers and experts from the nations and compensating them fairly for expert knowledge, developing programs of study in the history, culture and language of our peoples.
- 12.6 Support our First Nations capacity building, such as our colleges developing and implementing programs to train more native teachers for administration and instruction (for in-school and postsecondary levels).
- 12.7 Fund our First Nations to research and develop more curriculum resources that are culture and language based for all levels of education – Headstart to University.
- 12.8 Establish Board of education that includes more parent representatives from all the schools – on and off the reserve.
- 12.9 Use community experts such as elders in a meaningful way and compensate them fairly for their expertise.
- 12.10 Promote healing in the system so that success can be a reality. The continuing effects of the residential schools, chemical abuse and cultural breakdown are contributors to present day breakdowns of families and other relationships.
- 12.11 Remove artificial boundaries for on and off reserve Treaty rights that are portable (in reference to students who are off reserve and should get services, books and supplies, etc.)
- 12.12 Ensure that tuition agreements address all the needs of students.
- 12.13 Provide content of tuition agreements to First Nations that do not negotiate their own tuition agreements before ratification (to better serve the people).
- 12.14 Support First Nations to elect full voting board members (real voice and power).
- 12.15 Respect the First Nations education authorities that exist and have them select their own members to represent them on committees.
- 12.16 Support First Nations to review their own program and accreditation standards, teacher education and certification, authorized texts and resources, school and program accreditation, tuition fees and so on.
- 12.17 Include First Nations schools as recipients of all the extra resources that public schools get.

- 12.18 Fund curriculum projects under the direct control of Nation members.
- 12.19 Increase the scope of curriculum activity being supported besides language.
- 12.20 Support the creative alternative methods of delivery by our First Nations schools, for example, Language Immersion.
- 12.21 Support cultural teachings in all subject areas through hands on experiential learning.
- 12.22 Support cultural and environmental excursions and flexible scheduling to address these areas.
- 12.23 Work more closely with other agencies to address the holistic needs of students e.g.
- 12.24 Establish First Nations Schools in the city totally under the control of First Nations; support further study and action.
- 12.25 Introduce exemplary programs under the direction of First Nations in the public schools.
- 12.26 Regulate off-reserve schools to work cooperatively with our jurisdictions instead of competing for students.
- 12.27 Explore the influence and impacts of other entities outside of government, for example the ATA, on the recommended improvements for our students.
- 12.28 Trust and support First Nations to research, design and implement programs

***13. Strengthen Partnerships And Relationships Between First Nation, School Jurisdictions, Post-Secondary Institutions, Apprenticeship Providers, Vocational Schools, Industry And Government.***

Many of the recommendations on this theme are summarized in the paper by the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium. A few of the recommendations are presented here as a sample:

- 13.1 Raise community self esteem by tapping into First Nations member's talents.
- 13.2 Hire more role models in off-reserve schools, for example native teachers.
- 13.3 Pass legislation for recognition of tribal institutions by other governments, mainstream institutions and agencies.
- 13.4 Establish liaison with other jurisdictions to help better serve student needs
- 13.5 Notify and invite tribal leaders to all functions (e.g. graduations)
- 13.6 Provide regular exchange opportunities for urban and reserve students, teachers and parents.
- 13.7 Take on apprentices in the trades (companies and corporations).
- 13.8 Contract First Nations institutes to design content for awareness workshops, courses, etc.
- 13.9 Contract First Nations to design courses and programs that can be brokered by mainstream institutions and companies.
- 13.10 Recognize through legislation our First Nations accreditation processes.
- 13.11 Establish formal process for on-going direct input into policy formulation.
- 13.12 Establish a formal advocacy service for First Nations members.

## *Conclusions*

What we heard in the community sessions in regards to the programs and services that our Treaty 7 students experience in the public education system are not new. These have been brought up at various meetings over the years and are expressed in different documents. We were invited to participate in this review to solicit input from our community members and we eventually took on the challenge. We have summarized what our people have said and they have cautioned that the issues they brought up are equally important and are not to be taken lightly.

Their greatest wish is that something will come of this report and not follow the way of other documents that have not been taken seriously. They have also expressed that some of the discussions are just at a beginning stage. Now that they know they have been provided an opportunity to express their views they do not want the dialogue to stop. The process has provided a sense of hope that positive things will happen. Many more sessions are required especially on the discussions pertaining to jurisdiction and authority.

The process of conducting our own sessions and thus being able to dialogue in our own language is a positive step. This has been a real improvement from the usual approach. The question now is what happens to all this information? Our members feel that it would be criminal to just stop here. Our community members said that if Alberta once again ignores our concerns then we must press for alternative strategies to resolve our issues. The shared voices of our First Nations have outlined our visions for our children and in the process have uncovered the gross negligent and unethical ways that the province has used our students under the name of education. Many issues raised deserve further investigation and whether our students will eventually obtain the quality education they have a right to remains to be seen. We anxiously await positive and radical change in the months to come.