

Inequity of Education Financial Resources: A case study of First Nations school funding compared to provincial school funding in Saskatchewan

Inéquités dans les ressources financières en éducation : étude de cas comparant le financement des écoles autochtones au financement provincial des écoles en Saskatchewan

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Article abstract

In a review of First Nations band-managed school policies, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2002) noted what had been devolved was “the specific operation of the school. What was not devolved was an [education] system which would support the school” (p. 5) delivery of quality educational programming for First Nations’ students. The purpose of this paper is to compare available second level services and funding levels provided in schools operated by a Tribal Council and a provincial school division. Differences in service levels and funding, the authors argue, must be addressed if equitable services and enhanced learning experiences are to be available to all students regardless of school type attended.

INEQUITY OF EDUCATION FINANCIAL RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL FUNDING COMPARED TO PROVINCIAL SCHOOL FUNDING IN SASKATCHEWAN

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ABSTRACT. In a review of First Nations band-managed school policies, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2002) noted what had been devolved was “the specific operation of the school. What was not devolved was an [education] system which would support the school” (p. 5) delivery of quality educational programming for First Nations’ students. The purpose of this paper is to compare available second level services and funding levels provided in schools operated by a Tribal Council and a provincial school division. Differences in service levels and funding, the authors argue, must be addressed if equitable services and enhanced learning experiences are to be available to all students regardless of school type attended.

INÉQUITÉS DANS LES RESSOURCES FINANCIÈRES EN ÉDUCATION : ÉTUDE DE CAS COMPARANT LE FINANCEMENT DES ÉCOLES AUTOCHTONES AU FINANCEMENT PROVINCIAL DES ÉCOLES EN SASKATCHEWAN

RÉSUMÉ. En effectuant un examen des politiques de gestion scolaire des peuples autochtones, le Département des affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada a relevé en 2002 que ce qui avait été décentralisé était « la gestion spécifique de l'école. Ce qui n'avait pas été délégué était un système [d'éducation] qui pourrait supporter l'école » (p. 5) dans le déploiement de programmes éducatifs de qualité destinés aux étudiants autochtones. L'objectif de cet article est de comparer les services complémentaires et les niveaux de financement offerts dans les écoles administrées par les conseils de bandes à ceux prodigués par la division scolaire provinciale. Selon l'auteur, les différences existant en termes de niveaux de service et de financement doivent être abordées afin que tous les étudiants – quelque soit l'établissement scolaire fréquenté – reçoivent des services équitables ainsi que des expériences d'apprentissage bonifiées.

In 1973, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) notified the President of the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) that he agreed “completely” (Chrétien, 1973, p.1) with their policy document *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE). The document, developed by Chiefs and Councils and various Indigenous organizations across Canada, was a statement of educational philosophy, values, and future direction for First Nations educational jurisdiction (Henderson, 1995). ICIE espoused Indian parental responsibility and local control of education in partnership with the federal government. Over the next two decades, INAC divested itself of teachers, educational superintendents, and other professionals as the federal government embarked upon a devolution plan to transfer educational administrative responsibility to First Nations within the parameters of the Indian Act. The transfer of schools for the most part to individual First Nations was accomplished within existing federal legislation, administrative arrangements, policies, and without any significant increase in budgetary levels.

In 2002, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs noted that what had been devolved was “the specific operation of the school. What was not devolved was an [education] system which would support the school” (p. 5) and the classroom teacher in the delivery of quality educational programming for all First Nations students. The failure to fund First Nations educational system(s) has left First Nations schools unable to provide supportive second level services similar to the array of services established in provincial school boards/divisions. Such services compliment the classroom teacher’s instruction and initiatives by supporting individual student learning requirements through a variety of services provided by language arts consultants, psychologists, speech therapists, special education and curriculum specialists, among others. Furthermore, the federal government’s policy decision to cap financial allocations/transfers to First Nations at a 2% funding increase per year in effect guaranteed an inadequate funding formula for First Nations education since the cap did not take into account increases in student enrolment, requirements for ongoing curriculum development, appropriate programming to meet student needs, or cost of living and price increases.

The primary purpose of this article is to compare available second-level financial resources and services in select First Nations schools in Saskatchewan to those in one Saskatchewan provincial school system. A case study approach is used to compare financial resources of the Yorkton Tribal Council (YTC) and a provincial school jurisdiction, the Prairie Valley School Division (PVSD). Both educational entities are located in the same geographical area of Treaty 4 in southern Saskatchewan. The two entities provided the researchers with statistical information for this research study. The statistical data is situated within the context of the historical and contemporary setting of the purpose, delivery, and outcomes of First Nations education in Canada.

A DARK AND DISMAL HISTORY

Justice Thomas Berger (1991) argued that

Since 1492 Native institutions, their lifeways and their lands have been under attack... The history of the Americans has been the history of the encroachment of European societies on the Native peoples... [and Euro-Canadian] progress has been made at the expense of the Indians. (pp. x-xii)

Only “Native tenacity... persistence of their own beliefs and ways of life” (p. xiii), Berger argued, have enabled a people to survive. While Judge Berger’s focus is primarily on land issues and asks “what excuses” we had “for taking possession of the New World” (p. xi), his work is also applicable to education. First Nations people have survived five centuries of colonization but they have not prospered, as was promised in the numbered treaties (Morris, 1880/1991). The enactment of the Indian Act in 1876, which is still in place today, ensured that Canada would control, define, and set the parameters “for the education in accordance with this Act of Indian children” (as quoted in Imai, 2004, p. 209). Initially, in Western Canada, First Nations communities and missionaries worked together to build and operate day schools which treaty discussions mandated would not deter from Indigenous education practices and ways of life (Morris, 1880/1991; Carr-Stewart, 2001). Federal education policy and the control vested in the Indian Act eradicated day schools and replaced them with boarding or residential schools. The federal educational goal for First Nations students attending residential schools was

to fit the Indian for civilized life in his own environment...the curriculum in residential schools [was] simplified, and the practical instruction given [was] such as may be immediately of use to the pupil when he return[ed] to the reserve. (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986, p. 9)

Barman et al. (1986) argued further that Canada’s residential school policy “ensured that the formal education of Indian children would remain minimal even as that being accorded the White children [in provincial schools] was becoming more extensive” (p. 9).

Concern regarding the quality of education provided for First Nations students has been an ongoing historical issue at the local, provincial and national levels (McMurty, 1985). In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada noted “we remain concerned that a significant educational gap exists between First Nations people living on reserves and the Canadian population as a whole and that the time estimated to close this gap has increased slightly, from about 27 to 28 years” (p. 1). The annual *Indian and Northern Affairs Basic Department Data 2003* (2004) reported that over the past decade high school graduation rates decreased annually from 33.9% in 1995-1996 to 29.6% in 2001-2002. While many factors intertwine in this dismal picture, for too long a lack of funding and institutional resources have marred the provision of quality educational services for First Nations people. Ivison (2010, October 18), in an article entitled

Addressing Native Education: A Too-long-ignored Priority, emphasized that “we risk losing another generation or perhaps two” (paragraph 7).

TOWARDS A BRIGHT AND SELF-FULFILLING FUTURE

Battiste (2000) has argued that Indigenous voices once silenced by the colonizers are, in the twenty first century, “harmonizing Indigenous knowledge and Eurocentric knowledge, they are attempting to heal their people, restore their inherent dignity, and apply fundamental human rights to their communities. They are ready to imagine and unfold post-colonial orders and society” (p. xvi). Similarly, Leroy Little Bear has imagined “the possibility of a postcolonial society that would enable [First Nations people] to create our own sustaining and nourishing realities” (as quoted in Battiste 2000, p. xviii). Willie Ermine has raised “questions about the kind of education and curriculum needed to develop Aboriginal consciousness... [in order to] develop a greater appreciation of wholeness, connectedness, and relationships, the essence of the spiritual and the educational journey” (as quoted in Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. xvi). For First Nations people, therefore, education “is at the heart of the struggle... to regain control over their lives as communities and nations” and, moreover, to transform education from a system of “assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination” (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, p. xi). A holistic approach to education is essential for a postcolonial environment to be a reality. If the promises of the numbered treaties and the “unquenchable hope in the promise of education” (Castellano et al., p. xi) of First Nations people are to be realized, the fundamental requirement of an educational system – funding – must be provided on a consistent and focused basis.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNDING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

There has been substantive work presented on the importance of adequate resourcing of school programs in terms of their impact on student achievement, especially in cases involving disadvantaged socio-economic groups, as illustrated in the work of Grissmer and Flanagan (2006). Research in educational funding levels has linked the amount and nature of school funding with student achievement as suggested by the work of Bertolla and Checchi (2003). Their research identified the linkage between funding levels and the “amount, quality and heterogeneity of education” (p. 431) and the further linkage between educational services and student achievement. The role of school districts in affecting student achievement has been discussed in a Canadian context by Maguire (2003). Using a case study approach, he examined five Alberta school districts and the connection to student achievement. Maguire also noted earlier studies by Moreau and McIntire (1995), which identified a cause and effect between spending levels and student achievement in school districts in Maine on the American east coast.

Bidwell and Kasarda (1975) examined school district organization and student achievement, noting the particular importance of district decisions. Since instructional technologies were common to all schools, however, structural variation across school districts was primarily influenced by “professional staff support to the teaching function” (p. 58). Professional support included diagnosis of learning difficulties, speech therapy, counselling, and achievement testing. Swanson (1988) also noted the benefits in funding and in improving the quality of education using computer managed instruction and computer-assisted instruction and the corresponding requirement for district-wide technology support provided through second-level services.

Bell et al. (2004) identified inadequate funding as a major factor affecting the quality of education in First Nations managed schools in smaller school organizations. Fulford, Daigle, Stevenson, Tolley and Wade (2007) compared federally-funded schools to provincially-operated school systems in Eastern Canada and reached similar conclusions, especially with respect to limitations in program planning and design precipitated by the conditional nature of some of the funding provided by INAC. The disparities caused by successful and unsuccessful school submissions submitted to INAC regional offices to access one-time funding initiatives also fostered inequities in funding levels and programs offered in the schools. Bell et al. and Fulford et al. have argued that there is a linkage between improved education and student services and improved student outcomes. Furthermore, since second level services are generally concentrated at the district operating level, comparisons of district delivery of second-level services is warranted.

TWO SCHOOLS SYSTEMS

This study on which the present article is based rests on a comparison of funding levels and services provided in two educational entities: Prairie Valley School Division #208, a provincially-funded school division, and the Yorkton Tribal Council Education Department, an organization within the Yorkton Tribal Council (YTC). First Nations within the YTC receive educational funding directly from the federal government or indirectly through the Tribal Council. Both educational organizations are located in east central Saskatchewan and share, for the most part, geographically contiguous boundaries. First Nations students living on reserves affiliated with the YTC attend schools in both educational jurisdictions. Thus while the majority of students from each reserve attend school within their own community, some parents have elected to have their children bused to the local provincial schools.

Yorkton Tribal Council schools

The Yorkton Tribal Council represents five First Nations in eastern Saskatchewan including the Cote First Nation, Keeseekoose First Nation, Ocean Man

First Nation, Sakimay First Nation, and the Kahkewistahaw First Nation with a total population of approximately 1,900. The Education Department within YTC provides educational services to students from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12; teacher supervisory services in program instruction; co-ordination of professional development activities; and educational psychology and speech pathology support for member schools. In addition, White Bear First Nation, Cowessess First Nation, and Ochapowace First Nation are classified as unaffiliated bands and receive limited services from the Education Department.

Breakdown of school enrolment for the 2006-2007 school years is provided below in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Enrolment in schools served by Yorkton Tribal Council Education Department in 2006

First Nation School	Enrolment
Cote First Nation	162
Keeseekoose First Nation	162
Ocean Man First Nation	30
Saskimay First Nation	29
Kahkewistahaw First nation	207
White Bear First Nation(Unaffiliated)	132
Ochapowace First Nation (Unaffiliated)	134
Cowessess First Nation (Unaffiliated)	117
<i>Total</i>	<i>973</i>

Prairie Valley School Division #208

Prairie Valley School Division #208 (PVSD) was chosen as a comparator because of its geographical proximity to Yorkton Tribal Council; both entities are located within a predominately rural area. Furthermore, of the eight First Nations schools served by the Yorkton Tribal Council Education Department, four (Sakimay, Kahkewistahaw, Ochapowace and Cowessess), with 487 of the 973 students (50.0 %), are located within the geographically contiguous boundaries of the Prairie Valley School Division.

In 2006, PVSD operated 38 schools in 38 communities with a total enrolment of 8,036 students (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009). Of the total student enrolment in the provincial division, 18.5% of the students self-

declared as belonging to a First Nation (Prairie Valley School Division, 2008). The division employed 368.3 classroom teachers and 56.23 special education teachers along with 162 education/teacher assistants. In addition, the Division used 7.25 educational psychologists, 8.4 speech pathologists, 3.6 social workers, 1.98 occupational therapists and 6 student counselors in delivering second-level services to the students.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the actual expenses for second-level services for the Yorkton Tribal Council schools were compared to the activity levels of schools within the Prairie Valley School Division. The latest available full year of data (2006-07) was chosen to ensure that comparison was done on the basis of actual accounts as opposed to budgeted amounts. The basis of comparison included salary expenses for the superintendent of curriculum and instruction, department head, and secretary for second-level services, school psychologists and speech pathologists paid for by the Yorkton Tribal Council. The schools served by the Yorkton Tribal Council include a much smaller number of students (973 or 12.1% of the enrolment in Prairie Valley School Division) and, while the two comparators are similar in geographic location and dispersion, allowing for the large disparity in the size of the comparators was accommodated by comparing the activities on a per student basis. There are a number of implications to this approach that will be discussed below.

To allow for differences in the accounting for second-level services in the two administrative systems, the accounting protocols of the Yorkton Tribal Council (YTC) were adopted and realigned with detailed accounts of the Prairie Valley School Division (PVSD). This approach allowed a line-by-line comparison of activity levels between the two comparators; the summation of effort indicators permitted a smoothing of any discrepancies in codification of effort which may have existed within the two sets of accounts. This method of comparison, between two widely disparate sized entities, required a common assumption about the nature of the activity levels within each organization, namely, that the production functions employed within the entities are identical, continuous and homogeneous. We recognize the inherent difficulties in using such an enabling assumption, however it was assumed that both comparators are using similar methods in providing second-level services; that the value of this is reflective of the level of service provided; that any additional resources (or partial resources) added in the provision of second-level services either in PVSD or in the YTC would be equally as productive as previous resources employed, and would also be as productive whether added to either entity.

DATA

For the purpose of this study, data for second-level services for the 2006-07 fiscal year was provided by the Yorkton Tribal Council, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Prairie Valley School Division. Differences in accounting treatments between the organizations required some standardization for comparison purposes. For example, benefits paid to employees are charged to each office in the accounts provided by the Yorkton Tribal Council while they are paid out of separate object codes in provincial school systems; further, costs of benefits are shared between the Province and the individual school divisions. For this reason, it was necessary to restrict the comparison to actual salaries paid. Similarly, other operating and capital expenses, because treated separately and differently in each of the two accounting systems, were left out of the comparison.

A further adjustment was made to reflect the fact that three of the First Nations served by the Yorkton Tribal Council Education Department (White Bear, Ochapowace, and Cowessess) receive direct funding of \$57,083 from INAC to provide second-level services; these Nations then contract with the Yorkton Tribal Council to cover a portion (18.9 %) of the costs of the office of the Yorkton Tribal Council Education Department head but otherwise provide their own second-level services within their respective schools. To adjust for this, the \$57,083 was reduced by the amount paid to the Yorkton Tribal Council in order to approximate the amount spent by each these First Nations on their own second-level services.

Finally, the student enrolment as of September 30 of 2006 as provided by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and INAC was used to calculate the second-level services salary expense of the two comparators on a per student basis. Table 2 provides a comparison of services within the two entities.

From Table 2, it appears that the Yorkton Tribal Council and the unaffiliated schools in the Council area spent a total of \$272,312 on second-level services in 2006-07. By comparison, the expense on salaries of the Prairie Valley School Division, with its much higher enrolment, was over \$3.0 million in the comparable fiscal year. The Yorkton Tribal Council schools spent only 8.9% as much on second-level services in 2006-07 as did the Prairie Valley School Division.

On a per student basis, the Yorkton Tribal Council second-level services salaries amounted to \$280 per student in 2006-07, compared to a per student salary cost of \$379 in the Prairie Valley School Division. In this case the Yorkton Tribal Council budget for second-level services salaries was only 73.9% of the comparable spending level in the Prairie Valley School Divisions.

TABLE 2. Salary expense for second-level services, by type, Yorkton Tribal Council Schools and Prairie Valley School Division, 2006-07.

Expense description	YTC	PVSD
Supportive Instructional Salaries - Out of Scope (LEADS) ¹	\$104,569	\$700,059
Supportive Instructional Salaries - Teacher Contract	\$0	\$0
Program/Technical Support Salaries- Teacher Contract	\$0	\$1,092,174
Educational Administrative Support Salaries ²	\$29,705	\$407,571
Program/Technical Support Salaries ³	\$138,038	\$847,657
Total second level funding	\$272,312	\$3,047,461
September 2006 enrolment	973	8,036
Cost per student	\$280	\$379

NOTES. 1. Includes \$79,567 for “Department Head” and \$25,000 for “Superintendent-Curriculum and Instruction.” 2. Includes \$29,705 for “Salary-Secretary.” 3. Includes \$115,955 for “Consultants-Psychologist” and an additional \$22,083 (net) in funding used by the unaffiliated schools. Source: Yorkton Tribal Council, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Prairie Valley School Division and Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

IMPLICATIONS

Had the Yorkton Tribal Council been engaged in second-level services at a rate similar to the Prairie Valley School Division in 2006-07, it would have incurred salary expenses of \$99 more per student or a total of \$96,327 greater than it actually expended on salaries for these services equivalent to a 35.4 % increase in activity levels.

The 2006-07 salary expense of the Yorkton Tribal Council area was significantly below the proportion that would be required to provide services on a comparable basis with the Prairie Valley School Division. In that comparison, a salary budget of \$368,639 would be required to achieve service levels comparable with the Prairie Valley School Division as compared to the 2006-07 Yorkton Tribal Council area salary budget of \$272,312. While this would represent an increase in the salary budget for the Council area of \$96,327 (or 35.4 %), it has been calculated assuming constant returns to scale, or an assumption that there were no scale disadvantages in operating a small enrolment organization relative to a much larger one such as PVSD.

While this discussion and analysis has focused on salary expense, it must also be remembered that these data have been used only as a proxy for service levels with the two comparator organizations. A simple increase in the salary expense of the Yorkton Tribal Council will not necessarily match service levels provided in other organizations unless it is directed towards service activity level increases. Given the assumptions about homogeneous and continuous

production functions discussed above, there is every reason to expect an increase in inputs would yield a concurrent and proportionate increase in levels of service, outputs and outcomes.

The analysis above has been confined to salary expense and has not addressed the other operating costs associated with second-level services, mainly because of differences in accounting systems between the Yorkton Tribal Council and the provincially mandated schools, which makes identification of overhead or operating costs difficult. This is especially compounded by differences in the funding of staff benefits and the sharing of those costs between a school division and the provincial government and between the YTC and INAC. This analysis has, by necessity, been confined to the salary portion of this service category in the two entities. Full matching of the activity levels between the two comparators would also require similar adjustments to other service cost categories such as personnel benefits, travel costs, office operating costs and, possibly, capital costs.

It is possible, however, to derive a ratio for ancillary costs of operation relative to salary costs from the accounts of the Yorkton Tribal Council as in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Yorkton Tribal Council operating costs for second-level services, 2006-07

Item	2006-07 Expense
Administration	\$32,107
Rent	\$6,000
Professional Development	\$9,000
Travel	\$20,000
Employee Benefits	\$24,673
Other Operating	\$23,000
Total Operating Overhead	\$114,780
Total Salary Budget	\$272,312
Total Operating Cost	\$387,092
Ratio of Overhead to Salary	42.15%

Thus, 42.15%, the ratio of operating overhead to salaries, can be used to estimate an appropriate operating budget for second-level services for the Council using the results of the earlier comparative analyses of the average cost per student in the Yorkton Tribal Council to the PVSD. This calculation is shown below in Table 4 and compared to the total operating expense for the Council's second-level services for 2006-07.

TABLE 4. *Estimation of 2006-07 Yorkton Tribal Council second-level service total expense using Prairie Valley School Division comparables*

	Prairie Valley School Division case study basis
Salary Expense	\$368,639
Overhead (42.15% of Salary)	\$155,381
Other: Student Evaluations	\$17,775
Student Incentives	\$6,000
Student Youth Support	\$21,000
Total Comparable Operating Expense	\$568,795
2006-07 Yorkton Tribal Council Actual	\$387,092
Difference	\$181,703

This analysis would suggest that the total operating budget for second-level services in the area of the Yorkton Tribal Council would have to have been \$181,703 higher than the actual expense in 2006-07 to have provided a level of student services comparable to that provided by Prairie Valley School Division using the average cost per student in the PVSD. It should be noted at this time that these calculations were conducted under the assumption of continuous, straight-line production functions with homogeneity of degree one. While situated in different geographical locations, research by Swanson (1988), Dawson (1972), and White and Tweeten (1973) has provided evidence of economies of scale in school and school district operations. Their research suggests that there is at least a range of operations of scale in which decreasing average costs per student can be expected.

Economies of scale may also be applicable to the two sites in this research. Thus within the context of economies of scale, comparing the 1000 students served by YTC and the over 8,000 students within PVSD, may significantly understate the resource level that would be required by the YTC to match the per student service levels achieved by PVSD, especially in the provision of division-centred services such as second-level services. The existence of such economies of scale and their implications for service delivery in small scale districts like that operated by the YTC and, more importantly, for achievement of student outcomes in such operations, would be an important consideration for further research.

CONCLUSION

Following its acceptance of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1973), the government of Canada attempted to set a new direction for the management of First Nations education in Canada by transferring educational administrative responsibility to First Nations communities. However, a failure to ensure that meaningful second level educational services were available to these communities lessened the positive impact of this decision. Research evidence links student achievement with the availability of education services, especially for disadvantaged populations, including Aboriginal students (Bell et. al, 2004). Similarly, in relation to education, Paquette and Smith (2001) have pointed out that “failure to provide adequate [education] funding will almost certainly ensure that neither appropriate services nor desired results will occur” (p. 129). Furthermore, there is also evidence to suggest that district-centred services including speech therapy, school counseling, student testing, supervisory support and information technologies support all have a positive effect on schooling outcomes, again, especially in the case of disadvantaged youth. This means that strong second level educational services are vital components in student achievement.

A comparison of resource levels for second-level services in Saskatchewan between a provincially funded school division and a First Nations organization providing parallel functions to First Nations schools reveals that funding for second-level services lags significantly behind resource commitments in provincially-operated school divisions. Furthermore, within the context of economy of scale, smaller First Nations organizations will not be as likely as larger provincial counterpart organizations to access division-centred services as their provincial counterparts.

This significant shortfall in services to First Nations students can be expected to exacerbate disadvantages over time and needs to be addressed for significant improvement in student achievement to be realized. A similar array of second level services provided in provincial schools must be available to students attending First Nations schools in order to enhance the provision of education and to meet the individual needs of students. To ensure equity of second level services, various delivery options should be studied, piloted, and implemented. Such options may include centralizing second level services to First Nations organizations, which would then provide services to individual First Nation schools or small tribal councils; or purchasing of services from large First Nations education authorities, provincial school boards/divisions or other service providers. These or other options all require additional financial commitment to second level services for students attending First Nations schools. If the promise of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) is to be realized, dependable and justifiable financial resources targeted for First Nations students and schools is essential. Investing in First Nations education will enable each student to meet their potential and participate fully in Canadian society.

In *In Conversation: Shawn Atleo* Ken MacQueen (2011) asked Atleo, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, how change can take effect in First Nations communities and overcome violence, poverty, a sense of conflict between the historical and the modern ways, and the legacy of residential schools. Chief Atleo responded that his late grandmother told him we “no longer fight our fights with our fists. We fight our fights with education..... we’re seeing the young generation say there’s got to be ways we can support the health, wellbeing and future prosperity of our community” (p.1). The youth are the future. If change is take root in First Nations education, equity of funding between First Nations and provincial school services is essential. The Assembly of Nations has launched a *National Call to Action on Education* (2011) and has identified the need for a First Nations education guarantee focused on “statutory funding arrangements based on real costs, [and] indexation” to ensure that First Nations youth “reach their full potential and that our Nations resume our place as integral to the success and prosperity of Canada” (paragraph 2). Canada has built a nation on education and opportunities for all, yet First Nations people have been marginalized to the periphery as a result of the federal educational policy and funding. “The present and future quality of life in First Nations communities is dependent upon available and effective quality education services for all members of the community” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1988, n.p.). Providing equity of educational funding and appropriate services for First Nations students and schools is an essential step required immediately to effect quality education for all students in Canada.

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