



# First Nations Elementary-Secondary Education: A National Dilemma

By Waubageshig

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During the past five years, First Nations elementary-secondary education has been the focus of some useful recommendations in two major reports: the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in 2011, “Reforming FN Education: From Crisis to Hope,” and the 2012 Report of the National Panel on First Nations Elementary-Secondary Education. In response, the Harper government introduced Bill C-33 in 2014, the first-ever federal *First Nations Education Act*. Both reports identified much-needed reforms and despite vociferous opposition by a majority of FN leaders the *First Nations Education Act* was a serious effort to accommodate some of them. But neither the reports nor the eventually torpedoed Bill C-33 zeroed in on the three key components that serve as the foundation of any education program: teachers, principals, and the curriculum. If these three elements remain untouched in the new Liberal government’s First Nations education policies, First Nations education outcomes will continue to be a national humiliation.

Since the 1950s, these elements in First Nations education have not received the degree of critical attention they should have from First Nations and other educators, largely because all three fall under the jurisdiction of provincial ministries of education. And since the federal government is the principal government that interacts with First Nations, provincial legislatures tend to be ignored by FN leaders, often at their peril.

And with few exceptions, the provinces have been very restrained in choosing how to respond to the challenges of First Nations education. Most Ministers of Education argue that First Nations education is a federal responsibility to the point that it has become a timeworn and somewhat specious rationale for minimizing the development and introduction of the education reforms necessary to improve education outcomes for First Nations youth. This five-decades long argument has (a) diverted First Nations educators and politicians from taking a long, hard look at the three elements’ considerable impact on the steady decline in FN education outcomes and b) obscured the realization that without some crucial reforms in each of the three elements

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the desire to achieve stronger education outcomes for First Nations youth will remain unsatisfied and largely unfulfilled.

## Teachers

Teachers in First Nations education can be grouped into four categories: those who teach on-reserve; those who teach First Nations students off-reserve largely in provincial schools; teachers who are Aboriginal, either Indian or Métis; and teachers who are not Aboriginal. Teachers in the last two categories, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, work in both on- and off-reserve schools.

Regardless of where they teach, on or off-reserve, they all share a commonality. Most, if not all, teachers of a First Nations student are graduates of a college or faculty of education. With very few exceptions – teachers' aides and language teachers, principally – all have received the formal training qualifying them to teach. Despite their certification many of them comment on how ill-prepared they were to teach First Nations students.

Now, this situation is neither novel nor new. Eager but ill-prepared teachers have been descending onto Indian reserves since the mid-1950s. But almost seventy years later, why do today's teachers continue to experience profound challenges teaching these kids? The answer, I believe, lies in the colleges and faculties of education across Canada responsible for the professional preparation and training of all teachers, including those who will teach First Nations students, either on- or off-reserve. With one or two exceptions, the majority of these institutions have been guilty of ignoring the critical pedagogical skills needed by teachers in both on- and off-reserve schools for more than half a century.

A cursory review of the teaching faculties of a majority of Canadian teacher-training sites reveals that there are few master teachers with either teaching or research experience in First Nations education. Making matters worse is an absence of courses that examine the role of tribal cultures in education. What pedagogies are best suited for particular tribal cultures, for example? How does a student's tribal culture affect interaction and communication with a teacher? How does a particular tribal culture's child-rearing techniques influence

classroom behaviour? These are several examples where knowledge of tribal culture is a clear influence on teacher success or lack of it.

Instead, there is a plethora of courses that focus on informing student teachers about Indigenous political and social issues; i.e., Indigenous/Native Studies sorts of courses. The assumption is that teachers well-informed about housing shortages, youth suicides, and boil-water advisories, for example, will somehow be better prepared than previously trained teachers of FN youth. But, it's an unfounded assumption. The net result is that colleges and faculties of education are not preparing their students to become effective teachers of First Nations children in either on-reserve schools or off-reserve classrooms. Simply put, the presence of certified teachers in First Nations schools has not produced the desired education outcomes for First Nations youth.

In addition to a course or courses that enable student teachers to understand how tribal cultures affect their anticipated classroom work, another important course concerns the residential school experience. Both education faculty and courses need to help student teachers understand how this awful historical fact could affect both student behaviour and adult attitudes to education, in general, and to education authorities, i.e., teachers and principals, in particular. Teaching student teachers about residential schools strictly from a social-historical perspective, which is what currently happens, ignores completely the reality that residential schools to this day affect First Nations attitudes to formal education in ways that require training and understanding to overcome.

Aspiring teachers need to know that the residential school experience shaped attitudes in many FN communities towards education, in general, and schools, in particular. Numerous parents and leaders view schools and teachers today through the negative lens of the residential school legacy. It has convinced a great many parents that formal education is more of a threat than a benefit. Teachers unaware of this legacy have been, and continue to be, mystified and frustrated by what they perceive to be the general lack of interest shown by most parents towards even the smallest requests for parental

support for their children's education. Too many teachers confronted by this obvious lack of support develop harsh opinions of their students' parents that only harden over time.

Some colleges and faculties have for some time now ensured that their student teachers have access to placements in First Nations schools as part of their professional training. These are somewhat similar to co-op programs but often briefer. However, with few resources in either the professional curriculum or the instructional staff that focus on FN pedagogical issues, the in-house opportunities for student teachers to maximize the benefits of their placements in First Nations schools rarely emerge and a potentially rich learning experience is limited to what an individual student teacher can self-generate.

For any student teacher seeking employment in a First Nations school, their professional training to equip them for success is very thin. But what of the student teacher who has no interest in teaching in a First Nations school but ends up sooner or later teaching First Nations students? With more than 50 percent of the status Indian student population attending off-reserve elementary and secondary schools, that possibility is quite real. In fact, with the possible exception of the James Bay Cree youth in northern Quebec, most First Nations students resident on a reserve are required to attend an off-reserve high school to graduate, so many secondary school teachers in off-reserve schools will come into contact with First Nations students eventually.

The teachers these First Nations students encounter at either the elementary or secondary level are even more deficient in any training or professional development to respond to the students' educational needs than their peers who chose during their training to teach in a reserve school. Lacking interest in teaching in a First Nations school during their teacher training, they are bereft of even the limited benefits derived from training placements in a First Nations school. Over time, especially in schools in large urban areas with a large urban First Nations population, teachers with classes where the majority of students are native will have the occasional assistance of school board resources such as special counselors to help them develop some measures to deal with

the challenges. But in reality they are often minimal and seldom the product of sound pedagogical research and analysis.

And what of the classes in off-reserve schools where only a handful of First Nations students is present, perhaps fewer than six in a class numbering 30 or more? The continuous reality for these students is bleak. Their teachers overwhelmingly teach to the majority and either disregard or remain unaware of the educational needs of the few First Nations students in their classes. They're keenly aware that First Nations students are different; i.e., they don't participate in discussions, they don't complete assignments, and their attendance is spotty. But lacking any professional training that might help them respond to the range of educational needs of First Nations students, they can't even understand that such needs exist. These kids sink or swim and, with a high-school graduation rate nationally somewhere between 30 and 40 percent, swimming for First Nations students is a daily upstream struggle and sinking is a merciful solution to a system that at best views them as problems and at worst ignores their needs.

A partial remedy is for education ministries to insist that all faculties and colleges of education nationally include at least one credit course on Indigenous education as a requirement for a B. Ed. Ensuring that courses on Indigenous education concentrate on pedagogical and educational needs of First Nation students, rather than a survey of social and political issues, will provide a much-needed base of information that teachers can revisit when they encounter First Nation students during their professional careers.

Many years ago, beginning in the mid-1970s, several colleges and faculties of education created special programs to respond to the deficiencies in the training system and in their own programs. These specialized programs focused exclusively on producing First Nations teachers by limiting enrolment to First Nations students and by providing Native Studies-type courses in addition to a selection of courses from their existing mainstream curricula. The underlying assumption was that First Nations teachers, trained at a college or faculty of education, would succeed in First Nations classrooms unlike previous generations of teachers. And

by offering a program of studies rich in FN issues-oriented content, their graduates would be well-equipped to succeed in reserve schools where many others failed. Today, every province and territory has at least one university or college-based First Nation or Métis teacher education program, with some having three or more at different universities.

For over four decades these specialty teacher education programs have been actively certifying teachers principally for First Nations schools, and to a lesser extent for schools in Métis districts or communities. Although statistics don't exist to confirm it, the likelihood is that they combined to certify, at the very least, 100 First Nations and Metis teachers annually during this period. Therefore, since the mid-70s, approximately 5,000 trained First Nations and Metis teachers, at a minimum, have been working at one time or another in a First Nations school somewhere among the 630 reserves across Canada. The continued persistence of unacceptably low high-school graduation rates for First Nations students nationally should raise some serious concerns about what these specialized First Nations teacher education programs have contributed to the quality of First Nations elementary and secondary education since their inception.

On the surface, it appears that these First Nation and Métis-focused teacher training programs' biggest achievement has been the production of thousands of First Nations and Métis teachers who likely would not have acquired their certifications without them. The Saskatchewan University Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) claims to have graduated 1,500 native teachers since its emergence in the 1970s. That in itself is a good and supportable goal but if the purpose of these specialized programs is to strengthen the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students by producing certified First Nation and Métis teachers, then they all need to undergo either a rigorous self-examination or an external assessment because the dropout and failure rates of Aboriginal students nationally are shocking evidence that their fundamental purpose is not being met.

Unfortunately the First Nations and Métis-based special teacher education programs share the same weakness of their host faculties of education. Most fail to offer students courses

and learning materials that range from educating student teachers about innovative pedagogical techniques appropriate for a First Nations classroom to how to communicate effectively with a First Nations class and/or student. They need to shift from providing social and political issues-oriented courses to ones that help student teachers explore and research the cultural elements – i.e., social and family values, communication styles, and self-images, to name a few – of First Nation students that impact their learning, their behaviour, even their attitudes to formal education. Teachers, including First Nation teachers, in reserve schools need to know what tribal child-rearing practices either conflict or intersect with the classroom relationship between a teacher and students.

Many of these special programs have erroneously assumed that because the student teachers are Ojibway or Cree, or Stoney, for example, intuitively they “know” how to teach and communicate with native kids, so their training curriculum is devoted to courses focusing on political, social and historical content one usually finds in Native-Indigenous studies programs, alongside an array of courses selected from the standard teacher training curriculum. But educators don't make the same assumptions about non-Aboriginal student teachers. Faculties of education do not assume that any student teacher knows intuitively how to teach a class or knows how to communicate effectively in a classroom just because they were raised in the same culture as their students. No, as student teachers they are required to take a variety of courses to learn how to become effective teachers.

But clearly there is little or no benefit teaching First Nations student teachers the same kind of pedagogical content as their non-native cohort, especially if they will be returning to a school on-reserve. First Nations student teachers should be required to take courses in their specialized programs that expose them to pedagogies that have a greater chance to succeed in First Nations schools than the “standard” pedagogies designed for any classroom, as well as courses that help them understand the relevance of tribal child-rearing techniques and principles and how they apply to teaching in a First Nations school, and most importantly, how

to communicate effectively in a First Nations classroom. For example, how does a teacher, even a First Nations teacher, communicate with youth whose cultural environment minimizes or excludes the interrogative? Or, what if the students are unwilling or unable to participate in discussions because their culture considers youth too inexperienced to have anything important to say? And, what if the tribal culture of students relies on indirect communication as the medium of discourse? These are just a few examples that reveal how important it is for Indigenous teachers to learn the tribal culture of their students.

In the absence of these sorts of culturally based courses and other related course content, the First Nations teacher education programs will only continue to produce a cadre of professionally qualified teachers who will struggle, perhaps to a lesser degree than their colleagues from away, but struggle they will; they will not succeed in improving education outcomes of First Nations children.

## Principals

Principals in First Nations education work in two different environments: schools on- reserve and schools off-reserve. Principals in the latter category rarely see a large cohort of First Nations students unless their schools are designated receivers for students from northern and remote communities, or their schools are in or near urban areas with a large native resident population. But every year, principals in provincial schools are encountering First Nations students as more and more families either choose or are forced, because of a lack of housing or employment, to live off-reserve – whether in small towns or small cities separate from the metropolitan cities with traditionally large First Nations populations. At both on-reserve school or off-reserve schools, the reality is that the majority of principals in First Nations education, like the majority of their teachers, lack an appropriate professional training relevant to the educational needs of First Nations students. Their lack of training is an additional factor that contributes to unacceptably low First Nations education outcomes nationally.

What could the appropriate professional training for principals address? Because too many principals in on or

off-reserve schools today are unaware of what works and what doesn't work pedagogically with First Nations youth, a sound understanding of the variety of pedagogical skills that have proven successful in different First Nations schools is an important training component.

Principals also need to learn how to deal positively with the resistance by both families and students to regular attendance. Nationally, the absenteeism rates of First Nations students in both on and off-reserve schools are off the chart. Principals simply do not know how to remedy this issue, one that severely impacts the ability of First Nations students to succeed academically. Beyond conducting daily or weekly telephone calls, or suspending students whose absenteeism rates skyrocket, they are at a loss for solutions. In the recent past and today, too many principals accept chronic absenteeism as a fact of First Nations education and, instead of introducing measures to mitigate severe student absenteeism, many choose to see it as either a cultural issue – i.e., formal classroom education is alien to most First Nations cultures – or a community social issue best resolved by local authorities, not the school.

As with their teachers, principals also need training in the cultural makeup of the community and by extension of the students in their schools. Understanding and recognizing the prevailing social, economic and spiritual values of the community in which the school is situated, or the various cultures of the First Nations students attending their school off-reserve, would enable principals to communicate effectively with parents and leaders and would contribute to sensitizing their teaching staff to potential cultural conflicts that, if unaddressed, increase the likelihood students will fall further behind in their education.

In any school that reflects a positive learning environment, the working relationship between principals and teachers is key to its success. The challenge for all principals working in a reserve school is knowing how to work effectively with a multi-cultural staff. Some are able to learn on the job; others never quite figure out how. Many First Nation schools have a preponderance of teachers who are either from the local community or are members of the community's tribal culture.

Unless a principal is trained to work in a cross-cultural environment, or has some formal understanding of the cultural factors of either the community or the indigenous staff, difficulties are inevitable.

As for how severe these difficulties are, one can only guess. But the reality is that this situation has been present for as long as principals from outside the community have been engaged in First Nation schools, and despite the evidence that a number of principals do learn to adapt to the culture of the host tribe, many do not. That reality impacts the schools' learning environment, the relationship with parents and students, and ultimately whatever it is/was that took the principal to a First Nations school in the first place.

If teachers working in First Nations schools need specially designed courses to learn how and why residential schools affect First Nation students, so, too, do their principals. Principals not only represent authority, they are authority figures in the community and if the adults and youth in a First Nations community perceive authority through the lens of the residential school experience, principals need to understand how that history and experience colour attitudes towards authority, and most importantly, education authority, and come to some understanding on how to deal effectively with this challenge. In addition to understanding how residential schools continue to impact attitudes towards education and schools, there is a plethora of other socio-political issues that, if studied and discussed, will inform principals about strategies to improve education outcomes for First Nation youth. Some examples include the role of Indian Agents, the *Indian Act*, and treaties.

Indian Agents dominated every facet of First Nation life on reserves for more than 100 years. Although they were phased out in the 1970s, their impact on First Nation attitudes and behaviour is not well understood, if at all. It's reasonable to consider that a system of agents whose authority was unchallengeable, absolute, and continuous for over a hundred years coloured their victims' attitudes to imposed and alien institutions such as the school. What's unknown and perhaps critical to what principals do is how this authoritarian system has affected attitudes towards formal education?

Both on- and off-reserve principals, but especially those who work on-reserve, need to learn about these issues. But

more than just learning about them, principals (and teachers) should be afforded the means to discuss and research how they relate to topics such as student behaviour in and out of the school and parent and youth attitudes towards getting an education, to mention only a few.

As critical as the lack of relevant training for principals may be in understanding why formal education fails First Nations students, the lack of education accountability for principals is arguably more critical. To whom is the principal accountable in a reserve school? In most cases, it's either a school committee made up of interested parents, the chief and council, or a local Director of Education hired from the community, or a combination of all three. Regardless of which entity has the responsibility, few have the professional expertise, educational background or access to resources on which to evaluate professionally a principal. In too many community schools, as long as the principal keeps his or her nose reasonably clean and, in particular, stays on the good side of the elected leadership, the principal's accountability is seldom if ever measured.

In an off-reserve school with a small or large First Nation student population, the principals are accountable to boards of education that may have one seat reserved for a First Nation representative. On what basis does the board evaluate their principals regarding First Nation students in the absence of any meaningful community representation? To be blunt, for either group of principals, on- or off-reserve, their accountability for their Indigenous students' academic success or failure is minimal at best, and non-existent, at worst. Accountability measures relating to the academic performance of First Nations students for both groups of principals are desperately needed and, until they are developed and implemented, improvements in First Nations education outcomes will be slow to materialize.

Recently, the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative introduced a pilot program for principals in First Nations education. Hosted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and assisted by a cadre of First Nation educators nationally, it may serve as a much-needed model for principals and would-be principals wishing to improve their skills and knowledge in First Nations education.

Missing from the First Nations education arena is a national association for principals who work with First Nations students on- or off-reserve. In the short term, it could mitigate the principals' lack of training in First Nations education issues by enabling them to share best practices and information relevant to a host of topics, such as student absenteeism, working in a tribal culture, and effective pedagogical innovations. A national association could serve to increase the level of awareness of principals, particularly those with off-reserve First Nation students, towards the numerous factors unique to First Nations education that impact, often negatively, on the academic performance of so many First Nation students. Too many principals in urban schools with a small or large First Nation student body remain uninformed about these kids and therefore lack the means to deal with the challenges they present.

As a final comment on principals, the high number of First Nation students from reserve schools who dropped out or failed to graduate from high school during the past three decades suggests that most principals in on-reserve schools have unwittingly adopted an unwritten policy of promoting students regardless of their academic skills and abilities. To a considerable extent, such a policy minimizes conflicts with either parents or chiefs and councils and so for principals (and teachers) there's more than a whiff of self-interest and self-preservation embodied in it. But these kids, who are the products of this policy, drop out or fail to graduate because they enter off-reserve high schools anywhere from one to three years behind their provincial cohorts academically. Not only does this practice ensure that First Nation students from reserve schools wind up in remedial classes where their academic success is severely reduced but it transfers the culpability for their lack of success from the reserve schools to the off-reserve high schools. The costs of simply moving on-reserve students through the system without regard for their intellectual and academic development are bankrupting First Nation communities in every way imaginable and the practice cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

## The Curriculum

The need for fundamental reforms in the curricula used in First Nation schools is long overdue. All reserve schools, elementary and secondary, use provincial or territorial curricula. This wholesale application of provincial-territorial curricula has been in effect since the mid-fifties when the federal government officially adopted them as part of the nationally policy to integrate reserve schools into the Canadian education system. Previously, reserve schools operated as mission-run day schools where neither teachers nor curricula were certified or accredited. Federal officials, in response to criticism from parents and leaders about the inadequacies of reserve schools, believed that introducing provincial curricula would alleviate these concerns and also ensure that reserve schools would gradually become integrated into the provincial education systems across Canada.

As bereft as the training of teachers and principals for reserve schools has been, the curricula are equally impoverished. A provincial curriculum simply doesn't work for First Nations schools. From the get-go in the 1950s, no one thought to challenge or even raise the assumption that the provincial curriculum was the appropriate learning vehicle for First Nation children. If it was good for provincial schools, it had to be good for reserve schools, right? At that time this sentiment may have had some relevance. Education curricula in schools for First Nation children before 1950 alternated between the manual and religious training in the infamous residential schools and mainly religious training with a modicum of literacy and numeracy content in the mission-run day schools that came into being in the 1850s. So by 1950 anything, including the provincial curriculum, had to be an improvement. But over six decades later it can be argued that the provincial curriculum was never appropriate for use in First Nations schools, even as a substitute for what passed as curriculum in the mission day schools and residential schools.

Here's why. Not one provincial curriculum has learning content that sequentially, over several grades, addresses the historical, socio-economic, and political environment of First

Nations communities either locally, regionally or nationally. First Nation students have been completely shut out from learning about their tribal histories, their past and current economies, their social successes and challenges, and their political institutions, past and present. These students spend all their time learning about others, hardly any time learning about themselves.

To a limited extent, ministries of education during the past couple of decades introduced Native Studies content for both elementary and secondary schools, and more recently some First Nation language courses, into provincial curricula to offset the wholesale avoidance of First Nation content. But these courses are feeble substitutes for what is required. Deprived of any learning content relevant to their cultures, communities, and their socio-economic and political institutions, First Nation students tune out, then drop out. Judging by absenteeism rates, the tuning out commences in earnest around grade four or five and persists until the inevitable conclusion between grades 10 and 12.

Without delving into the reasons why the Canadian education system systematically excludes relevant learning content from First Nations youth throughout their elementary-secondary studies, the fact that it happens guarantees a disconnect between these students and the curricula beginning with kindergarten until they finally call it quits, be it grade 10, 11 or 12. The disconnect is substantial as reflected by the skyrocketing absenteeism rates nationally and, worse, the disconnect extends beyond students to their parents. Lacking any or minimal connection to their children's education content, too many parents see little reason – beyond the recognized importance of acquiring a modicum of literacy and numeracy – to ensure their children are prepared daily to prosper in school. This disconnect between the educational content and students and parents needs to be addressed. This can be accomplished several ways – here are three.

First, a new elementary-secondary curriculum for First Nation schools is needed that includes a core of the standard academic subjects, such as mathematics, the arts, etc., alongside subjects adapted for First Nations schools, such as science and technology, language arts in addition to a subject or subjects on First Nation civics. This curriculum needs to be discussed, researched and developed by ministries of

education, either in tandem or alone, working with First Nation educators.

Second, a similar exercise should be undertaken to begin a five-year project to develop a First Nations Civics curriculum for grade 1-8. It should be treated in the same way as an elementary science or social science curriculum, for example, and its focus should be informing a child about his or her community, its history, its institutions, its traditions and culture, its economies – and progressively, its relationship to other communities, the province or territory in which the community is situated, to the nation as a whole and finally to the international community.

Third, the curriculum currently in First Nations schools needs to accommodate educational content that is more applied than academic. This is not a new or radical suggestion. Provincial curricula across the nation at both elementary and secondary levels from the 1930s to the 1960s included subjects that were practical and hands-on as opposed to abstract learning. Manual training and home economics were two such subjects. Adapting the school program to include several applied subjects in First Nations schools would not only equip students with potentially valuable manual-practical skills useful in their communities, but could also convince parents of the utility of education beyond the acquisition of passable literacy and numeracy rates. Training in entrepreneurship in senior elementary grades and high school would unlock opportunities for youth to explore opportunities via the internet.

The number of potential courses is extensive. To insure relevancy of this approach, the applied subjects should reflect either the economic or geographic interests (or both) of the particular region rather than imposing several applied subjects nationally. Thus, students in the West Coast would select from a variety of applied courses befitting the unique economy and environment of the coastal region. Whereas students in northern and remote communities would benefit from a selection of courses appropriate to their northern economies and environment.

Many First Nation parents, as argued earlier here, do not have as strong a commitment to the value of a formal education as other parents elsewhere. Education, and by this I mean formal education, is and has been perceived through the lens of the residential school experience by a majority



of First Nations for over 100 years. By now, everyone knows that experience produced severe emotional and physical pain throughout First Nation communities nationally, and it has produced enduring suspicion and anger towards formal education ever since. One major reason why many parents react either defensively or aggressively towards teachers and principals is part of the legacy of residential schools. Another is the role of Indian Agents and the authoritarian system they represented.

Including subjects in First Nation schools that have an applied value will help to persuade parents and community leaders that formal education has benefits beyond basic literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, First Nation people are pragmatists. If something from outside their culture and traditions has value and relevance, it quickly becomes an integral part of their culture. They accept and integrate into their cultures what works for them. The best and most recent examples are the snowmobile, ATVs, chainsaws, and satellite telephones. Other examples abound.

If the school curriculum can provide their youth with valuable applied skills as well as a solid level of literacy and numeracy, parental interest in their children's education will be enhanced considerably. What educators and legislators need to bear in mind is that improving education outcomes for First Nations youth depends considerably on convincing parents, in ways that are meaningful to them, that a formal education is essential and valuable for their children's future, not to mention the future of their communities. If a majority

of parents continue to low-ball education success and achievement, their children will too.

But repeating this over and over doesn't work. The message has been delivered for decades with little or no response. Measurable proof of the value of education in the form of young adults possessing practical and applied skills in addition to literacy and numeracy is desperately required. Clearly, the wholesale application of the provincial education systems on First Nation schools during the past six decades has failed to persuade 75 percent of parents and students that a formal education beyond grade 10 or 11 is worth pursuing. It has been a miserable failure by any measure and several generations of First Nation youth are its victims.

Our federal and provincial governments have failed to provide the appropriate and adequate means by which First Nation youth receive a formal education for far too long. Many people now recognize that First Nation elementary-secondary education requires several fundamental reforms to improve education outcomes for students on- and off-reserve. One hopes that the new Liberal First Nations education budget will be one of several actions leading to positive outcomes. However, new federal education policies and budgets will fail to improve education outcomes if authorities continue to ignore the curriculum in First Nations schools and overlook how teachers and principals who work with First Nations students are trained.