



# Saskatchewan



# Notes

## Access to Post-Secondary Education in Saskatchewan: A Review of the McCall Interim Report

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### Introduction

The government of Saskatchewan's Post-Secondary Education Accessibility and Affordability Review Interim Report (hereinafter referred to as the McCall Report) was made public in April 2007. The government's decision to study the affordability of post secondary education and its accessibility was driven by two fundamental conditions. After approximately ten years of steady tuition fee increases, the government froze tuition in 2004.<sup>1</sup> Because from the educational institution perspective, tuition freezes are not considered workable in the long term and Saskatchewan's university tuition levels were nearly the highest in Canada, a new tuition policy framework had become imperative. Secondly, McCall's Report is a follow up to the 2005 Training System Review Report, which made 121 recommendations regarding how the provincial training system should be positioned to meet the needs of provincial labour force development for the next 10-15 years. Among its sweeping recommendations was a 30 per cent increase in training system seats comprising SIAST, regional colleges, Aboriginal institutions and the apprenticeship system. Such a major expansion of the non-university post secondary system will create significant pressure for a revised system of student financial supports to ensure post-secondary education program seats, including the universities, are filled. A rapid tightening of the provincial labour market requires an increasing number of graduates in many occupations to stem growing labour market pressures. Thus in 2006 McCall was charged with determining the most effective mix and type of interventions required to improve learner access and affordability to Saskatchewan's post-secondary system.

A public consultation process was undertaken during late 2006 and early 2007 and stakeholders were asked to address four questions.

- What barriers to post-secondary education do Saskatchewan people face?
- How should the responsibility to finance post-secondary education be shared? What are the appropriate financial contributions to post-secondary education of individuals, families, institutions, employers and governments?
- What are the most effective financial supports, including the design and delivery of student financial assistance programs?

- How do we maximize access to post-secondary education to ensure opportunities in the Saskatchewan economy and labour market?<sup>2</sup>

Breakthrough policy responses to these questions, particularly question two, could lead to a long term post-secondary education funding model, one that at minimum may spell out a provincial government financial benchmark contribution serving all post secondary educational institutions, including cash strapped Aboriginal institutions.

CCPA Saskatchewan welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on this interim report and to provide suggestions we feel would move the province more towards a truly equitable and accessible post-secondary education system.

### Need for a better definition of affordability

Unfortunately, the interim report presently lacks a clear and logical definition of affordability. It states, "Affordability is literally the ability to **afford** (our emphasis) to participate and persist in post-secondary education." (p.16) The findings, however, seem to shy away from actually defining affordability or accounting for the average financial costs facing different groups of learners enrolled in different institutions and programs across the system. The report never calculates what levels of expenditures are deemed to be affordable, particularly for low income residents. This oversight is perplexing as a Sask. Learning study in 2003 revealed that all forms of costs such as travel, accommodation, food, low paying part time jobs were a major hurdle facing Saskatchewan post-secondary learners, particularly those living outside Regina and Saskatoon.<sup>3</sup> While the McCall report acknowledges that other fundamental non-financial barriers are important, they are insufficiently addressed.

### Need for further research and more detail of what is meant by the recommendations

While the report provides a plethora of data on provincial spending, federal transfers and student debt, there is little discussion of student incomes or student costs as they relate to accessing specific post secondary institutions in the province. Nor is there any substantive discussion of non-financial barriers in Saskatchewan and how they measure up in comparison to other jurisdictions. Without such data how is it possible to arrive at indicators that illustrate 'how much is too much' for various learners to contribute? The lengthy discussion of research findings attempts to provide an empirical basis for the report,

but for the most part demonstrates the inconclusiveness of much of the research

Some thoughtful innovations to tuition/student loans system issues are provided. Recommendations which call for more front end grants and bursaries, as an incentive for participation, as opposed to back end incentives that the government currently has in place, are worthwhile changes. The report, however, provides no actual details on new forms of front-end grants and bursaries.

Chapter 3 describes the highlights of the public consultation submissions and presentations and illustrates wide ranging views of stakeholders and citizens. Stakeholders included the two main universities, the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan, as well as submissions from the FSIN, FNUC, the Canadian Federation of Students, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and many more. A number of stakeholders recommended that there should be increased awareness and dialogue between high school students and post-secondary institutions. A common theme throughout was the need for increased provincial funding to offset the perceived financial burden that students face when entering and progressing in their programs. As well, several submissions referred to the non-financial barriers facing marginalized students including students with disabilities, Aboriginal students, and northern students (many of whom are Aboriginal). With regard to Aboriginal students, these barriers include the history of colonialism, racism on contemporary campuses, as well as the fact that many Aboriginal students are older than the 18-24 year old cohort, and have considerable family responsibilities which limit them financially, and in their ability to re-locate in order to attend post-secondary institutions. McCall's task for the final report, therefore, is to create a policy framework that specifically addresses the main consensus points.

### **Interim Report shies away from Fundamental reform**

The Interim Report recommendations, however, are a disappointment and represent missed opportunities to bring forth innovative change. The report does not open the door to a new model/funding formula that would provide more equitable financial contributions to the wide range of Saskatchewan post-secondary education institutions, or provide a framework that will more optimally meet the needs of a diverse student body.

McCall's interim recommendations are exceedingly cautious and tentative, marked by phrasing that may suggest a new provincial framework is a long way off. Many of the recommendations begin with wording such as "we need to explore ways", "begin a dialogue", "continue the discussion", and "investigate the range of possibilities". Secondly, many of the recommendations are a rehash of various other recommendations emanating from past government reports, for example, improving the credit transfer system, expanding recognition of prior learning, creating new school to work programs and investigating institutional best practices. Such initiatives have been on the table for a decade or more.

Despite the lengthy research review, and several references to submissions regarding non-financial barriers to post-secondary education, the report does not contain a substantive analysis of such barriers or their impact on specific groups of learners. The report seems to rest on the assumption that lower tuition and easier loan eligibility will automatically increase access for **all** learners, despite research to the contrary. New approaches leading to the removal or mitigation of non-financial barriers are largely absent even though the creation of additional spaces in the system for currently marginalized students may logically produce the greatest gains in overall access.

A glaring example of the failure to focus on barriers and recommend solutions is found in the three recommendations related to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal post-secondary institutions. Data on Aboriginal learners demonstrates that they face the most barriers, as well as the most severe barriers. Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation research reveals that First Nations aspirations for achieving post-secondary credentials are very similar to the rest of the population.

A recent survey of First Nations people living on reserve shows that 70% of those between the ages of 16 and 24 hope to complete some form of post-secondary education, and almost 80% of parents hope their children will do so. ... When those youth who are planning to go to post-secondary education are asked if anything might change their plans, 48% say it would be lack of money, 43% say they may need to work to support their family and 42% say it would be because their grades are not good enough.<sup>4</sup>

McCall also cites the same research paper.

### **Aboriginal post-secondary education ignored again**

Saskatchewan's provincial education system provides an interesting case history with respect to Aboriginal people. Since the 1970s a parallel post-secondary system has gradually evolved with both First Nations and Métis institutions delivering trades and technical programs and the First Nations University of Canada (previously Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) delivering university programming.

"Compared to other provinces, a relatively high proportion of Saskatchewan's population is Aboriginal (13.5% according to the 2001 census). This proportion is growing, although recently the trend has been slowing down somewhat (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b: 6-7). In addition the median age (20.1 years) of Aboriginal persons in Saskatchewan is younger than in any other province. Approximately 20% of the province's school-aged population is Aboriginal (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b:109). While a high proportion (82%) of First Nations students living on-reserve attend First Nations schools, most First Nations students living off-reserve as well as Métis students in Saskatchewan are enrolled in the provincial system."<sup>5</sup>

Saskatchewan recognizes that Aboriginal peoples are “historically unique peoples occupying a unique and rightful place in society.”<sup>6</sup> The Saskatchewan government since 1989 has publicly stated that educational programs must meet the needs of Aboriginal students, and that changes to existing programs are also necessary for the benefit of all students. Furthermore in 2003 the government report, *Building Partnerships: First Nations and Métis People in the Provincial Education System* was released. It was developed with involvement from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and called for improved supports and educational outcomes of First Nations and Métis students, as well as high quality learning programs for all students.<sup>7</sup> And most recently, *The Learning Community in Aboriginal Education: Priorities Report 2005-2007* argued strongly for increasing partnerships and shared decision-making with Aboriginal peoples and the “development of and access to practical instructional and learning resources that are respectful of Aboriginal cultures.”<sup>8</sup>

Given the demographic imperatives and the long standing commitments to strengthen Aboriginal education in the province, it is difficult to comprehend why McCall recommends: “In the short to medium term, a dialogue must begin among the provincial government, the federal government and Aboriginal people around financial supports for Aboriginal people wanting to enter and complete post-secondary education”.<sup>9</sup> *Surely we are far beyond ‘beginning a dialogue, particularly since Aboriginal post secondary education institutions have existed in the province since the 1970s.*

The McCall report cites ample evidence that the federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) does not support enough First Nations learners (apparently since 1989 a waiting list each year of 1,000 prospective students exists), nor are the individual student grants generous enough to actually cover student living and education costs.<sup>10</sup> The report also makes abundantly clear that the Provincial Training Allowance is inadequate and must be increased substantially to ensure learners have an opportunity to return to adult basic education courses or other alternatives to secure the grades that will ultimately prepare them for entry to post-secondary education. While McCall’s 14<sup>th</sup> recommendation insists the federal government “fulfill its obligations” by increasing funding through PSSSP, the interim report makes no commitment to boosting the Provincial Training Allowance.

Finally, while McCall recommends continued work to develop “culturally and socially relevant non-financial supports” for Aboriginal students, there is a lack of substantive discussion of how to do this. One possible means would be strengthening of supports for existing programs such as ITEP, NORTEP and SUNTEPs. Silver and Mallet’s recent study, *Aboriginal Education in Winnipeg Inner City High Schools* has forcefully demonstrated the need for more Aboriginal teachers, relevant content in an Aboriginal curriculum, and policies to reduce racism in schools. (Two

thirds of Aboriginal school leavers in Winnipeg cited the presence of racism in schools.)<sup>11</sup> Since the establishment of ITEP (Indian Teacher Education Program) in 1972-73, followed by the emergence in 1980 of SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) and NORTEP (Northern Teacher Education Program), all with the specific goals to educate and train First Nations Métis educators for urban and northern Saskatchewan locales, more than 650 students have graduated from SUNTEP and 267 have graduated from NORTEP.<sup>12</sup> Both programs produce students with excellent reputations as teachers and role models in their communities. The graduation rate at SUNTEP and NORTEP is high. In 2006, however there were only 12 graduates from SUNTEP and 16 from NORTEP.<sup>13</sup>

Another avenue for the education of First Nations teachers is at the Faculties of Education at both the University of Regina and Saskatoon. At the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina in 2006, 16 persons graduated with an Aboriginal Education degree. At the University of Saskatchewan, no teachers graduated with an Aboriginal Education degree.<sup>14</sup> The number of First Nations and Métis teachers is insufficient, as is the funding to these programs. In 2005-2006 provincial funding to SIIT was approximately \$688,000. SUNTEP and NORTEP received \$2,747,811 with the greater share of funds going to SUNTEP. As well, the province provided a \$2,061,500 grant to the First Nations University of Canada.<sup>15</sup>

The McCall report is quick to point out how Saskatchewan has increased spending in the post secondary system in recent years. The report states that per capita spending on post-secondary is \$572. (p.10) If the province were to fund post-secondary education institutions on a per capita basis, then First Nations and Metis institutions, who serve 13.5% of the population should receive approximately \$75 million per annum. Instead they receive in the neighbourhood of \$7 million per annum from the province.<sup>16</sup>

It is unfortunate this report has not paid close enough attention to research with respect to Aboriginal education and the education of Aboriginal teachers as it points the way to sound policy changes, changes with which Saskatchewan Learning/Advanced Education and Employment appear to be in agreement. At minimum the final report must recommend increased funding for Aboriginal teacher preparation and other technical and university programs. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have declared:

The availability of “rich” (or enriched) intellectual property delimits what is now called “opportunity to learn”- the presumption that along with providing educational “standards” that detail what students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus intellectual property must be undergirded by “real” property, that is, science labs, computers and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers. (p.54)

## Need for more emphasis on accessibility for adult learners

The McCall report unhappily has nothing new to say about increasing adult learner (including Aboriginal) accessibility, especially the cohort, post 30 years of age. At a time when K-12 enrolments are in decline and the 18-24 age cohort is decreasing, the report provides no new initiatives for assisting adult learners to opt into life long learning as a way of life. Currently adult learners are relegated to part time attendance in continuing education offerings, usually night and distance education courses. As well, part time students who take out student loans must begin repaying with interest immediately. This disincentive to adult learners could be removed. However, most importantly our post-secondary institutions must develop unique school-to-work/work-to-school programming at affordable costs to attract older adults into many occupations where labour shortages are looming

## Conclusion

The McCall report's interim recommendations will not create a more equitable post-secondary education system, nor is it likely to increase access significantly. Tuition fee reform may make post-secondary education somewhat more affordable for those in the middle class and above, but as the recommendations currently stand, there is nothing significant for the disabled, Aboriginals, older adults or low-income people.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.saskatchewan.ca/>
- <sup>2</sup> Post-Secondary Education Accessibility and Affordability Review. A Report by Warren McCall. April 2007. Government of Saskatchewan., 56.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://saskgradsurvey.net/papers/skprjtlitreviewOct15-03.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> *Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education in Canada*, Millennium Research Note #2 (Montreal, QU: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Bouvier, Rita and Karlenzig, Bruce (2006). Accountability and Aboriginal Education: Dilemmas, promises and challenges. In *Our Schools/Our Selves Special Issue Spring 2006.*, 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18, 19.

<sup>8</sup> <http://sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/fn-me/docs/aepacpriorities.pdf>

"The Learning Community in Aboriginal Education: Priorities Report 2005-2007 (2005). 18.

<sup>9</sup> Post-Secondary Education Accessibility and Affordability Review. A Report by Warren McCall. April 2007. Government of Saskatchewan., XV.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Silver and Kathy Mallett, with Janice Greene and freeman Simard, *Aboriginal Education in Winnipeg Inner City High Schools (Manitoba: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, December 2002).*

<sup>12</sup>

<http://www.uregina.ca/orp/FactBookReports/convocation2000-06.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/ia/statistics/summary\\_pdfs/2005-2006\\_summary.pdf](http://www.usask.ca/ia/statistics/summary_pdfs/2005-2006_summary.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Financial Statements of First Nations University of Canada, year ended March 31, 2006., 5

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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