

**Briefing Note
October 31, 2004**

Issue: Executive summary on an educational assessment of school-age children at Natuashish and Sheshatshiu.

Background:

- During the early spring of 2003, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) appointed Dr. David Philpott and a team of researchers at the Faculty of Education, MUN to conduct an educational assessment of school-age children at Natuashish and Sheshatshiu.
- The assessment was conducted between April 2003 and June 2004.
 - During that period, Dr. Philpott presented three progress reports (orally) to the Maintable on Registration and Reserve Creation.
 - The Maintable includes a Federally appointed mediator and representatives of: the two Innu Band Councils, the Innu Nation, DIAND national and regional offices, the Departments of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs (DLAA) and the DOE.
- On Friday, October 29, 2004, Dr. Philpott and his team presented the final findings of the assessment to the Maintable.
 - Following the presentation, Dr. Philpott distributed copies of an executive summary of the study, entitled “An Education Profile of the Learning Needs of the Innu Youth - Brief Summary of Findings October 2004” and “Cultural Diversity and Education: Interface Issues” which consists of seven academic papers relating to the study.
 - He advised that the final copy of the report will be presented to DIAND at the end of November.
- **Key observations of the study**
 - Since 1993 there have been 3 “graduates” at Natuashish and 14 at Sheshatshiu, however these students did not pass public exams.
 - The school records are poorly kept - registers are not marked regularly or complexly (some record only students who attend).
 - Children tend to be “mobile” in that they often move from family to family and, in doing so, change names.
 - Attendance is the most obvious problem:
 - ✓ 33% of the approximately 900 students between 5 and 20 have not attended school at all in the last 5 years.
 - ✓ 17% of those who attend, do so for less than 20 % of the time.
 - ✓ The average attendance of those who go to school is 54%.
 - Drop-outs start in the primary grades.
 - ✓ 50% of those who start school, reach high school.
 - ✓ 30% of those who reach high school, attend for 20% of the time.
 - 66% of 7 year olds are at least one grade level behind.
 - 66% of 16 year olds are at least 5 years behind.
 - 100% of 15 year olds are at least 5 years behind in Math.
 - 80% of 7 year olds are 1 or 2 years behind in reading.
 - 85% of 15 year olds are at least 5 years behind in reading.
 - Students who attend schools other than those at Sheshatshiu and Natuashish attend 90% of the time
 - ✓ Those students are at or close to grade level.

- About 35% of Innu youth displayed learning difficulties consistent with FAS/E.
 - ✓ Dr. Philpott points out that the team did not include a medical practitioner, therefore no students were actually diagnosed with FAS/E.

- **Conclusions**

- Dr. Philpott concluded that the results of the study validated the perceptions and impressions of Innu leaders and educators reported at the outset.
- The study results Innu students who attend school regularly (most outside the community) achieve at or close to grade level.
 - ✓ Therefore, the greatest challenge is to identify ways to have these students attend school.
- Innu students appear to be of average ability, display diverse strengths and abilities, and lag in formal school achievement levels due in large part to poor attendance.
- Students start to fall behind and drop out at the primary level
- Readiness in the use English as the language of instruction in Kindergarten is a contributing factor to achievement levels.
 - To most of the students, English is a foreign language
 - Because language is fundamental to all learning, the report says it is essential that teachers be trained in the effective use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) techniques.
- There is a lack of collaboration between the various agencies working in the Innu communities.

- **Recommendations**

At the conclusion of his presentation to the Maintable, Dr. Philpott presented two recommendations:

- Consultations begin with the Innu and the Educators to determine what to do next. For June 2005
- Review best practices with other first nation groups. For December 2005.

- **Note**

It was noted that the researchers were unable to conduct any assessments related to the 33 % of Innu youth between 5 and 20 who have never attended school.

- **Decisions by the Maintable**

Following considerable discussion, the Maintable made the following decisions:

- The Education Monitoring Committee, established two years ago by the Maintable, will consider the report and present comments at the next meeting of the Maintable.
- The Innu Band Councils and the Innu Nation will take the lead in releasing information about the “Brief Summary” to the Press.
 - ✓ It was suggested that the two levels of government and the Innu issue a joint press release on the study.
 - ✓ The Innu will consider this suggestion.
- It was agreed that the report would be treated as confidential and no information would be released by any of the parties before the Innu issued a public statement.
- Dr. Philpott indicated he would speak publicly on the study only in response to questions from the media.