

Briefing Note
Departments of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs and Education

Title: Educational Assessment of School-Age Innu Children

Issue:

- This briefing note was prepared jointly by the departments of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs and Education for their respective Ministers for information purposes. It was also shared with the Department of Health and Community Services.

Background:

- During early Spring, 2003, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) contracted with Dr. David Philpott and a team of researchers at the Faculty of Education, MUN to conduct an educational assessment of school-age Innu children. The assessment was conducted between April 2003 and June 2004. During that period, Dr. Philpott presented three oral progress reports to the federal/provincial/Innu Maintable on Registration and Reserve Creation.
- On Friday, October 29, 2004, Dr. Philpott and his team presented an overview of his findings to the Maintable and distributed an executive summary, *An Education Profile of the Learning Needs of the Innu Youth - Brief Summary of Findings October 2004*, of his final report. The final copy of the report will be presented to INAC at the end of November.
- Key observations of the study include:
Since 1993 there have been 3 “graduates” at Natuashish and 14 at Sheshatshiu, however these students did not pass public exams. Poor attendance is the most obvious problem associated with poor performance:
 - 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;
 - About 35% of Innu youth displayed learning difficulties consistent with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effect (FAS/E); the team did not include a medical practitioner therefore no students were actually diagnosed with FAS/E; and
 - Innu students registered in schools in North West River or Happy Valley/Goose Bay attend 90% of the time and are at or close to grade level.
- Researchers were unable to conduct any assessments related to the 33% of Innu youth between 5 and 20 who have never attended school. It is not unreasonable to anticipate their educational attainment would be worse than the students assessed.
- Dr. Philpott concluded:
 - Innu students who attend school regularly (most outside the community) achieve at or close to grade level. 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. English is a foreign language for most students, accordingly, 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.
- Dr. Philpott made two recommendations:
 - Consultations begin with the Innu and the Educators to determine what to do next - to be concluded by June 2005; and
 - The MUN team to review best practices used by other first nation groups - to be concluded by December 2005.
- Following considerable discussion, the Maintable decided:
 - The Education Monitoring Committee (EMC), 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. (The Innu will consider a suggestion by the Province and federal government that there should be joint release on the study.)
 - 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.

Provincial Position:

- The Province supported the study. Dr. Philpott commented on the excellent cooperation he received from the Labrador School Board and the Department of Education. The Department of Education is represented on the ECM.
- FAS/E:
Currently, the departments of Education, Health and Community Services, Human Resources, Labour and Employment, Justice, Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs and the Rural Secretariat are developing and coordinating services for individuals with FAS/E.
- Devolution:
Over the past fifteen years, the Province has recognized that the schools in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish/Davis Inlet were not meeting the needs of the Innu and had attempted in a variety of ways to devolve control of the schools to the Innu. None of these attempts were successful. In 1998, Cabinet authorized the Minister of Education to establish “provincial schools”, as permitted under the *Schools Act*, in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. While initially supportive, the Innu declined the Province’s offer because they thought this would prejudice their attempts to have the federal government register the Innu and establish Band schools on reserves. Despite registration, there has been little progress on devolution and Sheshatshiu is still not a reserve. Officials of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs and Education have raised again the possibility of establishing a “provincial school” in Sheshatshiu. (This is no longer an alternative for Natuashish which is now a reserve with a federal school operated under contract by the Province.)
- On October 25, 2004, Chief Qupee wrote Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs requesting the Province begin negotiations to establish a “provincial school” in Sheshatshiu. If successful, the Innu will be provided with control over how the school operates in Sheshatshiu. This may increase the interest of parents in the school and in the education of their children.

Reviewed by: Cabinet Secretariat
November 3, 2004