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1. Preamble

This document is prepared for the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) under the Education Partnerships Program with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). It is a research project that documents the Educational and Training Needs of Native Counsellors in the province of Ontario. The focus of this research is in the area of Aboriginal Student Success and the role of the Counsellor. For the purposes of this textual piece Aboriginal Student Success is identified as the retention, transition and graduation practices (strategies, programs, spaces, resources, other) that support Native learners. A culturally appropriate educational plan for Native Education Counsellors will give them the tools to support their clients (and this can only come from the communities themselves). This plan can then provide insight into the types of provincial and federal partnerships to pursue in making these training ideas a reality.

2. Background Information on the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association

The Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) is a not-for-profit organization that represents the needs and interests of Native Education Counsellors. There are approximately 154 paid members that belong to ONECA and they come from 11 distinct districts. These areas do include Brantford, Fort Frances, Georgian Bay, James Bay, Kenora, Lakehead, London, Nakina, Peterborough, Sioux Lookout and Sudbury. Each district is represented by an elected designate that sits on the Board of the Directors. This board is made up of these 11 members, as well as the Executive Committee (elected) which are made up of the President, the Past President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.

ONECA is a leader in providing culturally appropriate counselling education and does this through its Native Counsellor Training Program (NCTP). This organization also has an annual conference that responds to the needs and issues affecting Native Education Counsellors today. ONECA is driven by Aboriginal Student Success and building educational capacity and healing/wellness in our Native communities. This organization also offers Aboriginal student scholarships, district identified workshops (example: Women Abuse Affects Our Children), research/publications, educational issues fact sheets and coordinates campaigns in sync with Aboriginal Education challenges. ONECA's head office is located in the community of Whitefish Lake First Nation and has a solid website with links.

3. Background Information on the Education Partnerships Program Proposal

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) launched a call under its Reforming First Nations Education Initiative to accept proposals for the investigation of Educational Partnerships between a Regional Aboriginal Organization, the Ministry of Education and INAC. The intent of these partnerships is to establish working relationships and share services that would facilitate Aboriginal Student Success. Four priority areas were identified: developing First Nation/provincial arrangements, mutual sharing of services, improved coordination for smooth transitions, creating linkages between school levels. Six submissions were funded in Ontario and ONECA was successful.

The Education Partnerships Program is implemented in three phases; the first is called Preliminary Consultations, the second is called Partnership Establishment and the third is called Partnership Advancement. The first phase is intended for the Regional Aboriginal Organization to bring First Nation communities together and investigate the possibility of moving into the Establishment phase. The second phase has a clear deliverable and that is the drafting and negotiating of a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (may also include an action plan). The third phase is the drafting and implementation of joint action plans within the Memorandum of Understanding framework.

ONECA's proposal is very clear in its direction and emphasizes the need to establish an Education and Training Plan for Ontario Native Education Counsellors. This plan will be focused on identifying professional development, diverse courses, in-service opportunities and other educational initiatives that facilitate Aboriginal Student Success (retention, transitions, graduation). These types of deliverables are best served by engaging in provincial and federal partnerships with the same goal. The ONECA proposal has deliverables that include the development of a plan (based upon consultation and research) and the investigation of potential partnerships based on this plan. The findings and recommendations will be instrumental in the direction of ONECA.

The Research Consultant hired to carry out this proposal and plan is Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek. She has 16 years of combined experience in Aboriginal education/issues, multidisciplinary research and curriculum development/publications. Dr. Toulouse is an experienced educator that is a Professor in the School of Education at Laurentian University.

4. Background Information on the Research Project

Introduction

The research on Aboriginal Student Success and the role of the Native Education Counsellor has been triangulated by a literature review, focus groups and a survey. The themes pursued under Aboriginal Student Success are retention strategies, transition practices, graduation success and attrition rate factors. The themes pursued under the heading of the Native Education Counsellor are roles, responsibilities, barriers/challenges and training/educational needs. Data on First Nation Schools, First Nation Communities and Educational Achievement has also been collected. This supplementary information will be utilized to support the Native Education Counsellor in the demands of his/her profession. It will also be important for the communities in Ontario that require facts and figures to access further funding and positions.

Literature Review

The literature review is incorporated throughout this document according to the specific areas. The professional resources drawn upon come from a series of refereed journals, practitioner articles and online sources. The literature review began with the collection of textual pieces and an analysis of their applicability to this research. The next phase has resulted in these best practices and findings being integrated into the sections that are the most appropriate.

Focus Groups

A total of 11 focus groups were held in the province of Ontario. 5 of these were with Native post-secondary students and another 5 of these were with Native Education Counsellors. The final focus group was held with the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association Board of Directors.

The Native post-secondary student sessions focused on:

- Reasons/Factors that led to their current pathway and retention in college and university.
- Challenges/Barriers that may (or have) impeded their successful completion of a college and/or university program.
- Characteristics/Knowledge held by the Native Education Counsellor that supported their educational aspirations.
- Recommendations/Strategies that will facilitate Aboriginal student success as defined by these groups.

The Native Counsellor sessions focused on:

- Characteristics/Descriptors of their current roles in the Native Education Counselling field.
- Challenges/Barriers that they perceive Native students (at all levels) face in achieving educational success.
- Strategies/Suggestions of programs, people, resources, ideas and activities that facilitate Aboriginal student success at all levels.
- Recommendations/Advice on training opportunities for Native Education Counsellors that will enhance services for Aboriginal students.

The ONECA board session focused on:

- Characteristics/Descriptors of Native Education Counsellors in each of the ONECA districts.
- Barriers/Factors that affect the educational success of Aboriginal students in each of the ONECA districts
- Native Education Counsellor training needs and opportunities of each ONECA district.
- Recommendations/Suggestions for future deliverables from ONECA that specifically support Aboriginal Student Success.

Survey

Approximately 200 people were invited to complete the Native Education Counsellor Training Needs survey on Zoomerang (web-based service). 52 of the invited individuals completed the survey; which represents 26% of this population. The invited participants were ONECA members (as found on the ONECA listserv), ONECA 2009 Conference participants and NCTP (Native Counsellor Training Program) graduates (those that were available). Participants were invited by email, through the ONECA website and by mail-outs. The ¼ of respondents that filled out the survey represents a good

proportion and sample of Native Education Counsellors in Ontario (if you compare this to Angus-Reid polls in Canada which only surveys 7% of the entire Canadian population and their findings are within a 4% margin of error). A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendices section of this document.

Some interesting facts emerging from the demographic data of the survey show the following:

- 81% of respondents are members of ONECA and 19% are not.
- 23% of respondents are graduates of the NCTP program and 77% are not.
- 85% of respondents are female and 15% are male.
- 42% of respondents have an Undergraduate university degree. 34% of respondents have a college diploma. 13% of respondents have a Graduate university degree. The remainder of respondents are listed as other (high school diploma with training, certificates from an alternative Institution, apprenticeship, other).
- 40% of respondents are from the Sudbury district. 13% of respondents are from the London district. 9% of respondents are from the Lakehead district. 8% of respondents are from the Georgian Bay district. 8% of respondents are from the Brantford district. 8% of respondents are from the Peterborough district. 6% of respondents are from the Fort Frances district. 4% of respondents are from the James Bay district. 4% of respondents are from the Sioux Lookout district. 4% of respondents are unsure of the district to which they belong. 0% of respondents are from the Kenora and Nakina districts.
- 58% of respondents work in the post-secondary sector. 43% work in the secondary sector. 32% work in the elementary sector. 13% work in a sector classified as other (private, shared services). 8% work in the pre-school sector.

Conclusion

The results of the focus groups, survey and literature review are found in the areas titled Native Counsellor Roles/Responsibilities, Native Counsellor Training/Resource Needs, Aboriginal Student Success, Aboriginal Student Retention, Aboriginal Student Transitions and Aboriginal Student Graduation Rates. The data is clearly identified and rolled into the areas that are specific to it.

5. Native Education Counsellor Roles and Responsibilities

Introduction

In this section the roles and the responsibilities of the Counsellor are highlighted. There is also data that identifies the barriers/challenges that the Counsellor faces in his/her optimum performance. The 1st pie chart addresses the duties of the Counsellor. The 2nd pie chart addresses the parties that s/he is accountable to/for in their job. The final pie chart addresses the issues that s/he faces in their profession. These findings are critical to understanding the professional lives of the Native Education Counsellor and their relationship to Aboriginal Student Success.

Role of the Native Education Counsellor

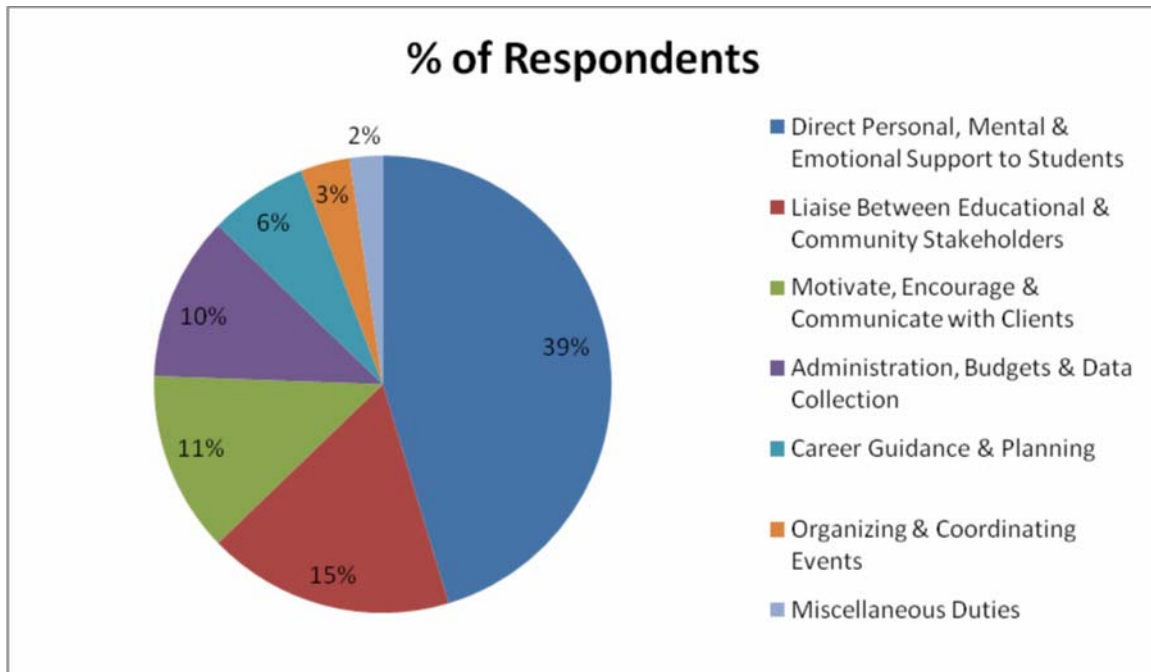
The Native Education Counsellor is such a critical piece in facilitating Aboriginal Student Success at all levels in the school system (Association of Community Colleges, 2005). S/he fulfills so many roles and his/her presence is key in the retention, transition and graduation practices for Aboriginal students (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). Some of the duties of the Native Education Counsellor do include:

- Provides social, mental and emotional counseling
- Provides career guidance, academic plans and pathways
- Plans and coordinates educational and cultural events
- Plans and provides life skills, wellness and job readiness workshops (Darou, 1998)
- Participates in school and community functions
- Provides cultural sensitivity and organizes spiritual workshops (Wyrostok & Paulson, 2000)
- Monitors student achievement and progress
- Coordinates academic and special needs services to students
- Researches and collates scholarship and bursary information
- Accesses and locates funding and/or administers financial resources
- Motivates, encourages and communicates with students
- Participates and contributes in Student Education Plans
- Collects data and provides reports according to funders
- Maintains and submits budgets for their departments
- Meets with other educators to bridge transitions between levels
- Communicates between Institutions and Students
- Communicates between all stakeholders and their representatives
- Interprets information and policies and provides to stakeholders
- Locates, maintains and distributes resources to educators
- Participates in working committees that are directly related to students
- Participates in strategic planning sessions to ensure a Native voice (Corbiere, 2000).

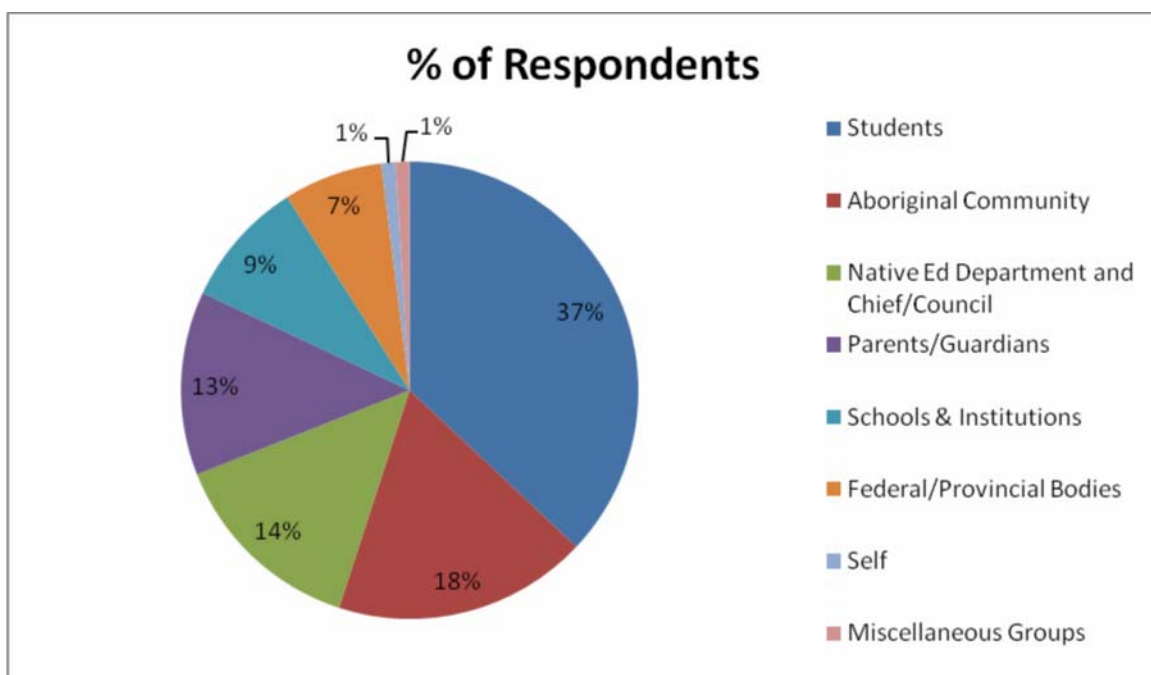
The Native Education Counsellor is the point person at an institution for Aboriginal students. It is so important this role be maintained and maximized (with adequate space) for relevancy in educational services to occur. Aboriginal students require culturally competent counseling services that meet their educational, mental, cultural, emotional and spiritual needs. They need to feel that they belong and are valued and this is provided by the Native Education Counsellor.

Results of Survey

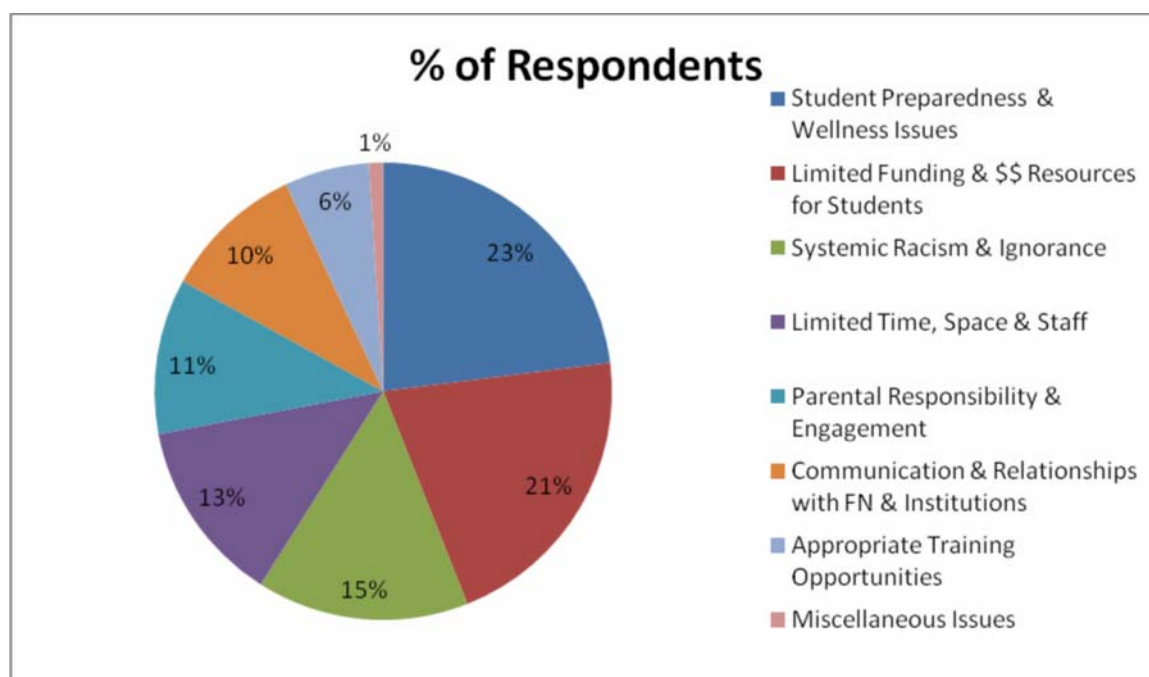
Pie Chart 1 – Main Duties of the Native Education Counsellor



Pie Chart 2 – Accountability of the Native Education Counsellor



Pie Chart 3 – Issues Facing the Native Education Counsellor



Results of Focus Groups

Table 1 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Respectful of student needs and resourceful in accessing services and programs |
| 2 | Committed to student success and setting priorities in retention and transitions |
| 3 | Highly organized and efficient, able to multitask a number of responsibilities |
| 4 | A dedicated team player that is also able to work independently with focus |
| 5 | Link between students, families, schools and communities on all issues in education |

Table 2 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Good listener and problem solver and able to address multiple student needs |
| 2 | Career pathway planner and provider of site visits and program opportunities |
| 3 | Cultural and wellness teacher/facilitator for students and schools and community |

| | |
|---|--|
| 4 | Link between students and families and schools – interpreter of policies/information |
| 5 | Administrator, data collector, curriculum developer and event coordinator |

Table 3 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Resourceful and dependable for student needs and accessing services/resources |
| 2 | Good listener that is respectful and accepting and has emotional counseling skills |
| 3 | Caring role model that has cultural knowledge and historical impacts knowledge |
| 4 | Academic planner and conducts career inventories to match pathways |
| 5 | Link between students, families, communities and schools (mediates, interprets) |

Table 4 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Owen Sound, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Respectful and Empathetic to student needs and accessing appropriate services |
| 2 | Supportive and resourceful in finding information and funding opportunities |
| 3 | Good listener that is able to provide mental/emotional/spiritual counseling |
| 4 | Researcher and provider of academic and career counseling for clearer pathways |
| 5 | Link between educational stakeholders (students, families, schools, bands) |

Table 5 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Dedicated and compassionate to student goals, aspirations and needs (holistic) |
| 2 | Good listener and resourceful strategist in career planning and academic counselling |
| 3 | Advocate and caring in accessing services for students, communities & schools |
| 4 | Mediator and problem solver for issues confronting their departments & clients |
| 5 | Sense of humour and cultural teacher integrated into mental counseling skills |

Table 6 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sudbury, Ontario

| From Greatest to | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|------------------|--|
|------------------|--|

| Least Stated | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 | Respectful and genuine person that is in regular contact with students (visits) |
| 2 | Familiar and knowledgeable with post-secondary and urban services/programs |
| 3 | Provides guidance and workshops on bursaries and scholarships |
| 4 | Facilitates career guidance and pathways (course selection and site visits) |
| 5 | Assists and provides academic supports for students (writing essays, exams) |

Table 7 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Empathetic and knowledgeable person that has student needs/success as a priority |
| 2 | Organized and accessible that is in contact with students about progress & issues |
| 3 | Resourceful and assists with access to scholarships/bursaries and urban services |
| 4 | Provides academic and career guidance that is matched with student strengths |
| 5 | Advocates and liaises between students and institutions on issues and events |

Table 8 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Encouraging and motivating person that has student success and needs at heart |
| 2 | Accessible and resourceful with contacting students about progress & home |
| 3 | Assesses academic and career strengths and matches with appropriate programs |
| 4 | Provides academic resources and training on life skills (essays, exams, living, time) |
| 5 | Knows post-secondary services and urban services (Native housing, YMCA, bussing) |

Table 9 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Respectful and accountable person that is committed to student success & needs |
| 2 | Resourceful and knowledgeable about scholarships and bursaries (assist with app) |
| 3 | Advocate/liaison on student rights and FN inclusion in school curriculum/program |
| 4 | Provides career guidance and matches with programs based upon student strengths |
| 5 | Knows services that are available to FN's in urban centres and at schools (directory) |

Table 10 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Accessible and qualified person that has student issues and success as a priority |
| 2 | Resourceful with career planning and matches student strengths to programs |
| 3 | Communicates with students in a variety of methods to update on progress & home |
| 4 | Provides assistance with program specific scholarship and bursary information |
| 5 | Facilitates academic success and life skills with appropriate resources & training |

Table 11 – ONECA Board of Directors Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Characteristics and Descriptors of Roles and Responsibilities of the Native Education Counsellor |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Personal, Social and Academic Counselling to Students |
| 2 | Liaison Between Students, Parents/Guardians, Community and Institutions |
| 3 | Career Planning/Fairs and Links/Visits to Institutions |
| 4 | Administrative Duties and Data Management of Student Success |
| 5 | Committees and Planning/Implementation of Events |

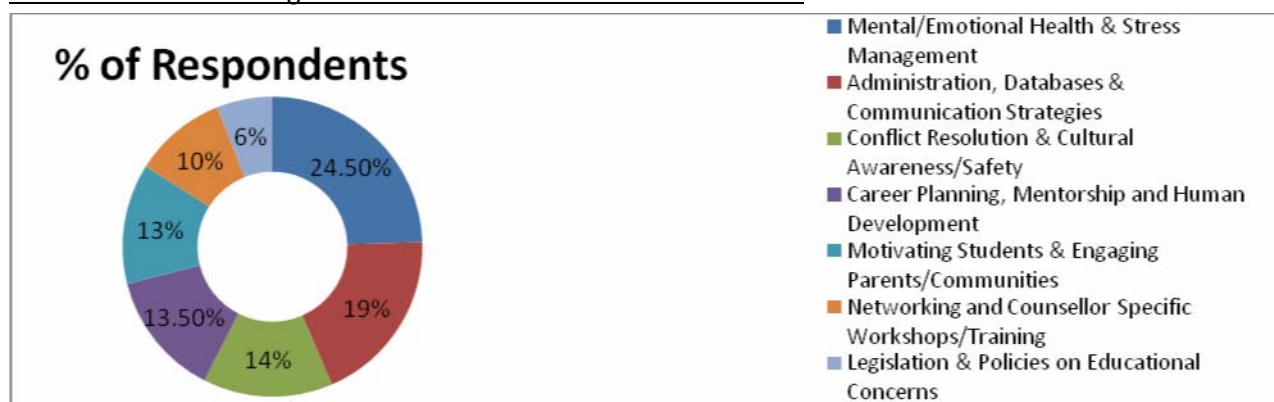
6. Native Education Counsellor Training and Resource Needs

Introduction

In this section the training needs of the Native Education Counsellor are highlighted. The Donut Chart 1 provides insight from the survey respondents in terms of their perceived training ideas. Results from the focus groups follow and demonstrate the importance of Native Counsellor specific educational opportunities that will promote Aboriginal Student Success.

Results of Survey

Donut Chart 1 – Training Needs of the Native Education Counsellor



Results of Focus Groups

Table 12 - Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Career, Program and Academic Pathways Inventories (kits and online) |
| 2 | Parental, family and community engagement strategies that work (examples) |
| 3 | Retention and transition programs (access to grants) in Canada (examples) |
| 4 | Scholarships and funding opportunities for students and counselors |
| 5 | Counselling Techniques for mental wellness (cognitive therapy, motivation) |

Table 13 - Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Career Paths Inventories/Resources (K to Post-Secondary) that is Online at ONECA |
| 2 | Mentorship and Support Systems/Strategies for Counsellors |
| 3 | Bursaries and Scholarships Kits with Application Templates for Students |
| 4 | Parental and Community Engagement Best Practices Happening Now |
| 5 | Retention Programs (after-school, sports, other) that are Happening Now |

Table 14 - Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Academic and career plans for students (all levels) that is module based & online |
| 2 | Scholarships and bursaries training/kits by program (letter/essay templates) |
| 3 | Accessing funding and proposal writing for Counsellors in Student Success |
| 4 | Specific Counselling Techniques in Mental and Emotional Wellness |
| 5 | Self Awareness/Self-Esteem and Traditional Knowledge workshops |

Table 15 - Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Owen Sound, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Diverse Counselling Techniques in the Mental/Emotional realm (cognitive therapy) |
| 2 | Career Pathways training with academic and program information/supports |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Resources (online and modules) on skills for success (writing essays, taking exams) |
| 4 | Traditional and cultural teachings for the school and classroom environment |
| 5 | Scholarships and bursaries training kit that is program specific (online & modules) |

Table 16 - Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Graduate Level Degree in Native Education Counselling (distance and live version) |
| 2 | Accredited courses (additional qualifications) in counselling techniques (varied) |
| 3 | Career Inventories and Academic Program Planning with students (pathways) |
| 4 | Scholarships and bursaries tutorial in program areas (live and online version) |
| 5 | Mental and Emotional Illness training with a focus in pharmacology (drug effects) |

Table 17 - Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sudbury, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Workshops on Program Specific scholarships and bursaries (apps, letters, essays) |
| 2 | Modules (online or paper) of services available in post-sec and urban location |
| 3 | Resources and PD on academic & living supports for students (skills for success) |
| 4 | Career Guidance Inventories and matching with Appropriate programs |
| 5 | Transition activities and strategies between the levels of school for FN students |

Table 18 - Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | PD on Academic Success Strategies and Resources for Students (online as well) |
| 2 | Crisis Intervention Counselling Skills and Referrals to Appropriate agencies |
| 3 | Communication Tools and Strategies with Students (linking to the community) |
| 4 | Resources in Urban Setting (Directory) for Students (Native Housing, Childcare) |
| 5 | Career Guidance Inventories and Transition Activities with Students (all grades) |

Table 19 - Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
|-------------------------------|---|

| Least Stated | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 | Student Strengths and Options in Careers Matched with Program Choices (visits) |
| 2 | Scholarships and Bursaries that are Program Specific (apps, letters, essays, funding) |
| 3 | Urban Services to Offset Living Expenses (Directory) for Aboriginal Peoples |
| 4 | Communication Skills and Strategies for Working with Students (Empathy) |
| 5 | Transition Programs between Levels of Schooling (role models, mentors, events) |

Table 20 - Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Communication Skills with Students and How to Advocate for Them at Schools |
| 2 | Additional Sources of Funding (scholarships, bursaries, subsidies) for Students |
| 3 | Career Inventories, Job Skills and Student Strengths matched to Programs |
| 4 | Transition Strategies for all levels to further education (role models, site visits) |
| 5 | Academic and Life Skills Resources and Training for Student Success (programs) |

Table 21 - Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Academic Preparedness and Career Pathways matched with Program Options |
| 2 | + Funding for Basic Living, School Materials and Additional Qualifications (First Aid) |
| 3 | Transition Strategies in the community to outside schools (role models, site visits) |
| 4 | Life Skills, Self-Esteem, Motivation and Traditional Teachings to Students |
| 5 | Communication Skills, Strategies and Counselling techniques to students |

Table 22 – ONECA Board of Directors Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Training Ideas to Support Native Education Counsellors in Facilitating Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Best Practices and Strategies for Parental Engagement in Education |
| 2 | Career Counselling Pathways Tools and Personality/Learning Styles Inventories |
| 3 | Scholarships and Bursaries Package – Modules for Application and Sources |
| 4 | Effects of Colonialism and Plans for Holistic Wellness (Celebrate Our Gifts) |
| 5 | Traditional, Cultural and Language Teachings of Our Peoples |

7. Aboriginal Student Success

Introduction

Aboriginal Student Success is defined as the retention, transition and graduation practices that facilitate the physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual. S/he in turn is a wholly developed person that is a role model who is academically successful and culturally competent. They give back to the community by finding their role in life and fulfilling it to the best of their abilities. The Aboriginal Student is influenced by many factors in reaching this state of being. In this section we will look at the factors for disengagement with school and this will be followed up by best practices in retention/transitions in the other sections.

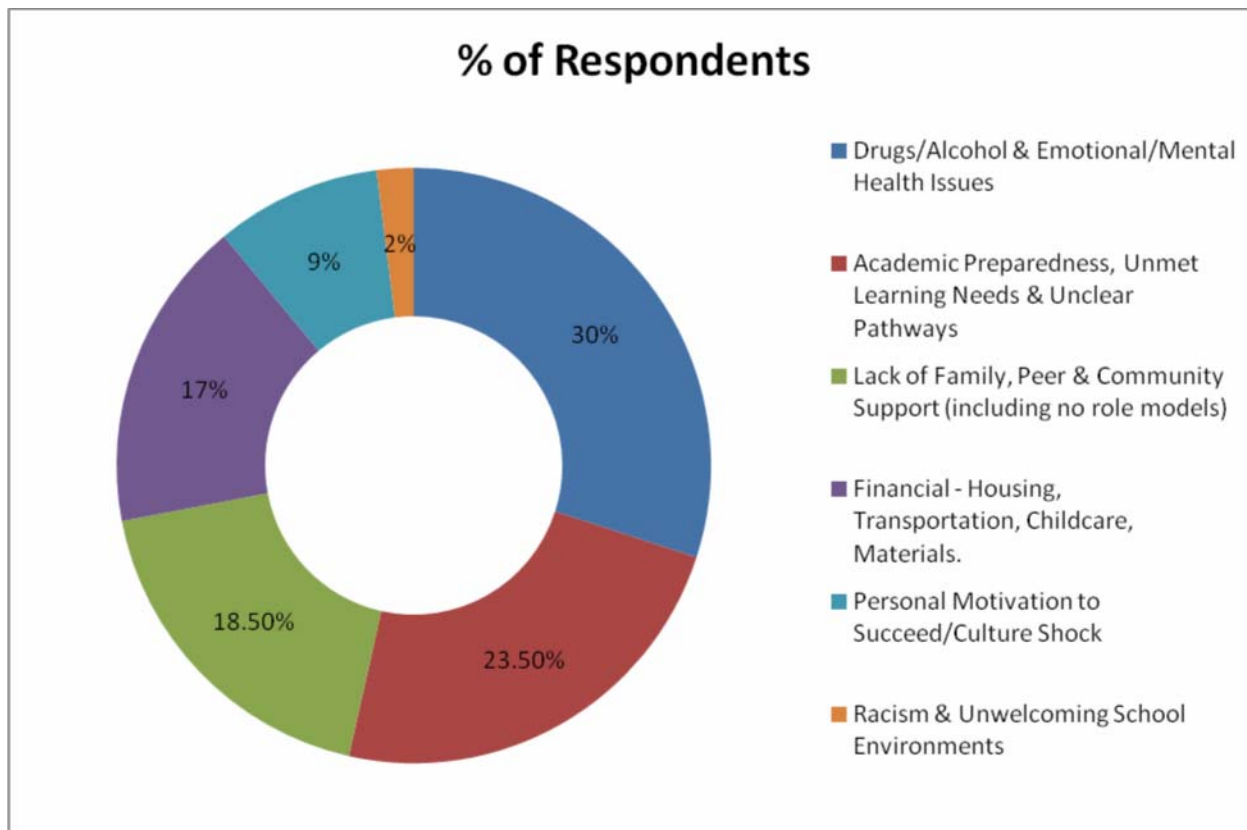
Early School Leavers and Factors for Disengagement

There are many theories on the factors that lead Aboriginal students to disengaging with schools at all levels. Some of these do include the institutional absence of:

- Culturally enhanced and supportive curriculum that is taught by caring educators (Toulouse, 2006)
- Schools that engage parents and communities to be equal partners in education
- Presence of a full time Native Education Counsellor that has a designated cultural space that can provide a wide range of services (Silver & Mallett, 2002)
- Academic preparedness and a clear pathway for career and program selection
- Teaching strategies and assessment that is culturally reinforcing and diverse (Oberg, Blades & Thom, 2007)
- Excursions and site visits to various educational, social, cultural and spiritual places that reinforces the ability to dream and think ahead
- Early identification and screening to support the learner from the outset of the educational journey
- Workshops that are designated for academics, independent living and self-esteem.
- Wellness physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually
- Adequate economic well-being that is defined as appropriate housing, food, access to care, clothing, transportation and other socio-determinants (Toulouse, 2007)
- Having role models and mentors as a key influence in their lives (Alberta Learning, 2005)
- Having FN band and educational policies/supports that are flexible and student success centred

Results of Survey

Donut Chart 2 – Early School Leavers and Reasons for Exiting Schools



Results of Focus Groups

Table 23 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Personal and Consistent contact from the FN Education Counsellor |
| 2 | Support and encouragement from family and community (role models) |
| 3 | Academic programming that is culturally relevant with diverse learning styles |
| 4 | Involvement in extracurricular activities, after-school programs and summer events |
| 5 | Career and academic plans that are supported by site visits and mentoring |

Table 24 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | FN Counsellor that is aware of needs, opportunities and events for students |
| 2 | Clear Career pathways that are matched by academic skills and success |
| 3 | Parental and Community engagement and presence in schools |
| 4 | Curriculum and learning styles that support the Native learners |
| 5 | Hierarchy of needs are met (food, shelter, other) at home and in school |

Table 25 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | FN Counsellors with Ethical Spaces for students that have a range of services |
| 2 | Aboriginal role models, mentors and instructors that are culturally competent |
| 3 | Academic skills (literacy and numeracy) that have supports (tutors, EA's, clubs) |
| 4 | Career education beginning in elementary to match secondary pathways |
| 5 | Financial support and a good home environment with supportive parents |

Table 26 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Owen Sound, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Parental engagement and community involvement in schools (programs/strategies) |
| 2 | FN Counsellor and a cultural space that offers academic, social & FN programming |
| 3 | Academic skills and supports that are in-class and after-school (clubs, tutors) |
| 4 | Financial support for transportation, housing, other and basic needs being met |
| 5 | Clear pathway in career education and academic programming selection |

Table 27 – Native Education Counsellor Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Clear pathways combined with academic skills in culturally supportive schools |
| 2 | Good transition plans and linkages to various programs (visits, fairs, conferences) |
| 3 | Aboriginal Education Centres with an Aboriginal Education Counsellor present |
| 4 | Parental and Community engagement at all levels in the students' education |
| 5 | Financial support and stability where hierarchy of needs is met (food, shelter, other) |

Table 28 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sudbury, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Financial Stability/Access to Resources for Housing, Childcare & Transportation |
| 2 | Academic skills in writing essays, taking notes, exams and time management |
| 3 | Support from FN counselor, family and community (role models, mentors) |
| 4 | Schools reflecting culture of FN's peoples (spaces for students, curriculum, events) |
| 5 | Clear Career Guidance that matches strengths and partnered with a program |

Table 29 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Financial Wellness for Quality Education, Housing, Childcare, & School Materials |
| 2 | FN Counsellor and a space with Culturally appropriate services, events & programs |
| 3 | Academic Preparedness and Living Skills for School (time management, budgeting) |
| 4 | Schools, staff and curriculum that is culturally sensitive to learning styles/evaluation |
| 5 | Career Pathways from elementary are matched with programs (site visits as well) |

Table 30 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in London, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Financial Stability and Basic Needs being met (housing, food, transportation) |
| 2 | Motivation and Self Esteem that is reinforced at home and at school with programs |
| 3 | FN Counsellor with a FN Centre that has cultural events and academic supports |
| 4 | Clear career pathway that highlights student strengths matched with programs |
| 5 | Schools and Institutions that have Staff and Curriculum that are culturally sensitive |

Table 31 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Toronto, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Support, understanding and advocacy from communities, home and FN Counsellor |
| 2 | Financial Stability that covers basic needs of students (home, food, transportation) |
| 3 | Self-esteem that is reinforced in culturally competent schools and school staff |
| 4 | Academic preparedness and life readiness for change from school to new school |

| | |
|---|--|
| 5 | Clear pathway in career education and goals match student strengths and grades |
|---|--|

Table 32 – Native Post-Secondary Students Focus Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Financial Support and Basic Living needs Met (housing, food, transportation, care) |
| 2 | Academic preparedness and skills for success in school (essays, critical thinking) |
| 3 | Options in Career pathways that are matched to student strengths and programs |
| 4 | FN Counsellor and a Space that has cultural/spiritual/emotional events & resources |
| 5 | Personal motivation, self-esteem and commitment to completing school |

Table 33 – ONECA Board of Directors Focus Group in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

| From Greatest to Least Stated | Factors that Contribute to Aboriginal Student Success |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Clear pathways that match academic and career strengths (plans) |
| 2 | Self-esteem, motivation and personal wellness |
| 3 | Academic preparedness and skills for schooling success |
| 4 | Parental/Guardian and Community involvement in education |
| 5 | Schools and staff that are culturally competent and offer cultural inclusion |

8. Aboriginal Student Retention

Retention and Aboriginal Student Success

Retention is defined as strategies, programs, policies, curriculum and resources that foster Aboriginal student success at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. It is the activities, events, rooms, people, values, support systems and environment that keeps our Aboriginal students in school. Retention is solely about Aboriginal students staying in school and having the tools (physical, emotional/mental, intellectual, spiritual) to be successful (ONECA Education and Training Partnerships Survey, 2009).

Preschool to Grade 8 Retention practices for Aboriginal students do include:

- Culturally appropriate curriculum that honours the contributions and language of the Native group (Kanu, 2007)
- After school programs (social, academic, health) that involves the parents and guardians
- Community resource people being present and active in the school system (Agbo, 2007)
- Mentorship and career workshops/events with the secondary and post-secondary levels

- Ethical spaces that are devoted to Aboriginal students with at least one full time Native Education Counsellor present
- Incentive programs for behaviour, attendance and performance (Mason, 1998)
- Coordinated activities between various departments that involve parents and community members

Grade 9 to Grade 12 Retention practices for Aboriginal students do include:

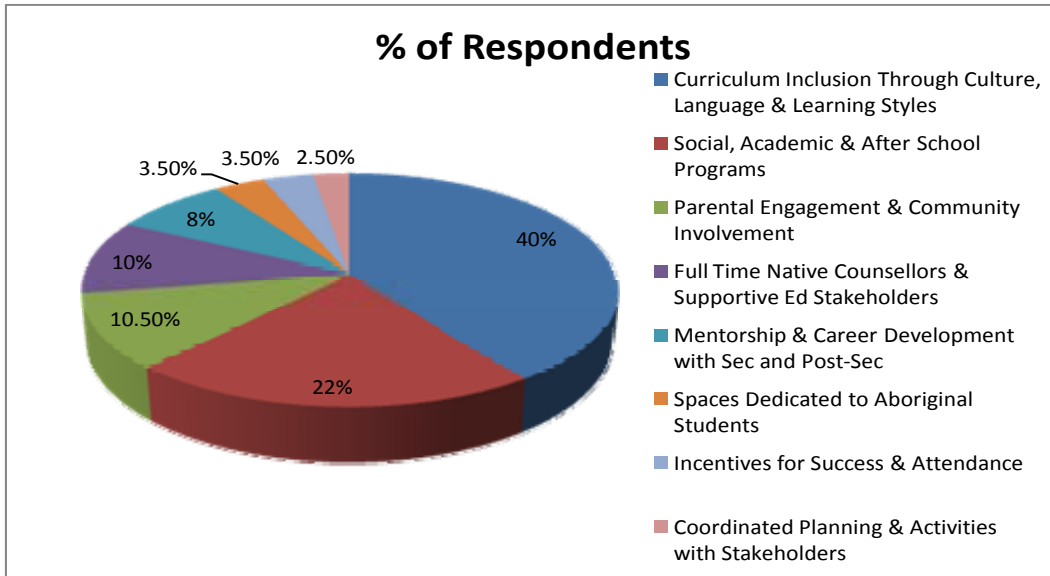
- Native specific programs, appropriate teaching methods and worldview inclusion in mainstream curriculum (Evans, McDonald & Nyce, 1999)
- Financial support for extra-curricular activities and incentives for success
- Career education workshops and events that are coupled with relevant cooperative education opportunities
- Visits and tours to various post-secondary institutions with planned activities that highlight the academics, services and social/recreational aspects
- Full time Native Education Counsellor in an appropriate ethical space that has a student services component - technology access for students (Greenall & Loizides, 2001)
- Culturally sensitive teachers, staff and administrators
- Parental involvement and community presence in the school (Chodkiewicz, Widin & Yasukawa, 2008)
- Aboriginal events and cultural activities

Post-Secondary Retention practices for Aboriginal students do include:

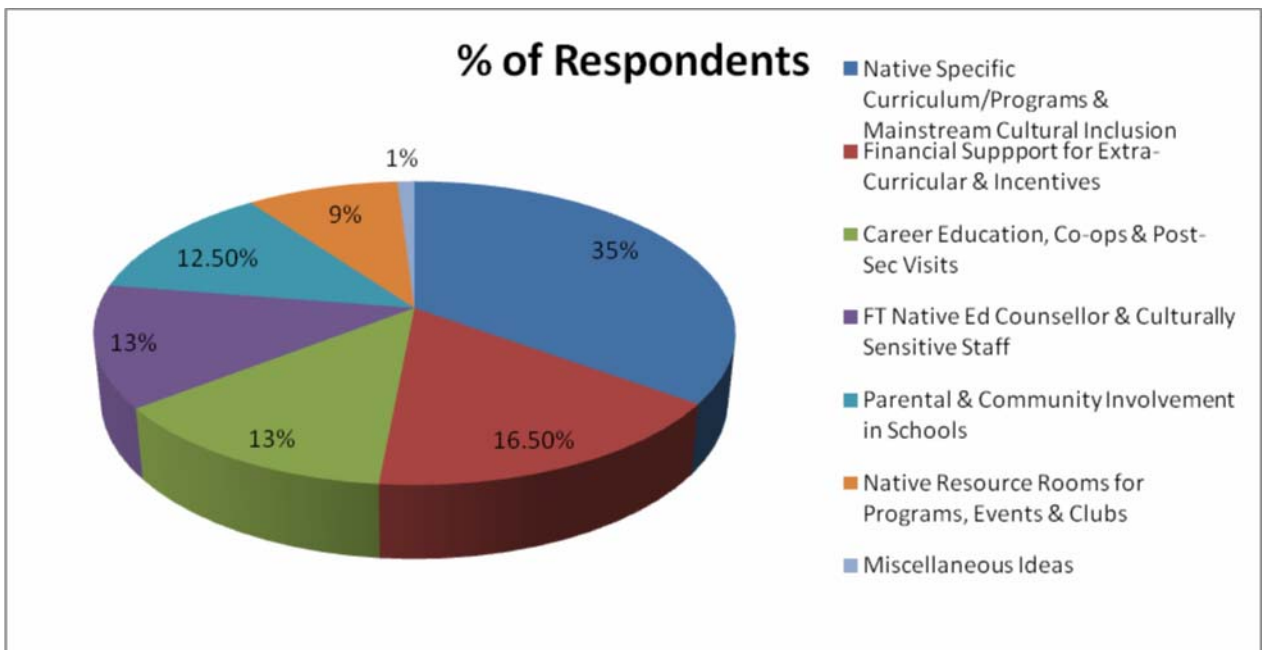
- Native Student Centres with a full time Native Education Counsellor that offers a ranges of services, events and supports
- Programs and workshops for academic preparedness and career pathways (matching program to variety of jobs)
- Financial support that is adequate for housing, childcare, transportation, technology and materials for class (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998)
- Access to scholarships and bursaries and assistance with the application process.
- Awareness of urban services (health, cultural, recreational, emotional/mental, other)
- Academic policies and supports that take into account the specific barriers of Aboriginal students (Pidgeon, 2009)
- Full time Native Education Counsellor in home community to provide information and linkage to base
- Family and community support of the student (Smith, 1999)

Results of Survey

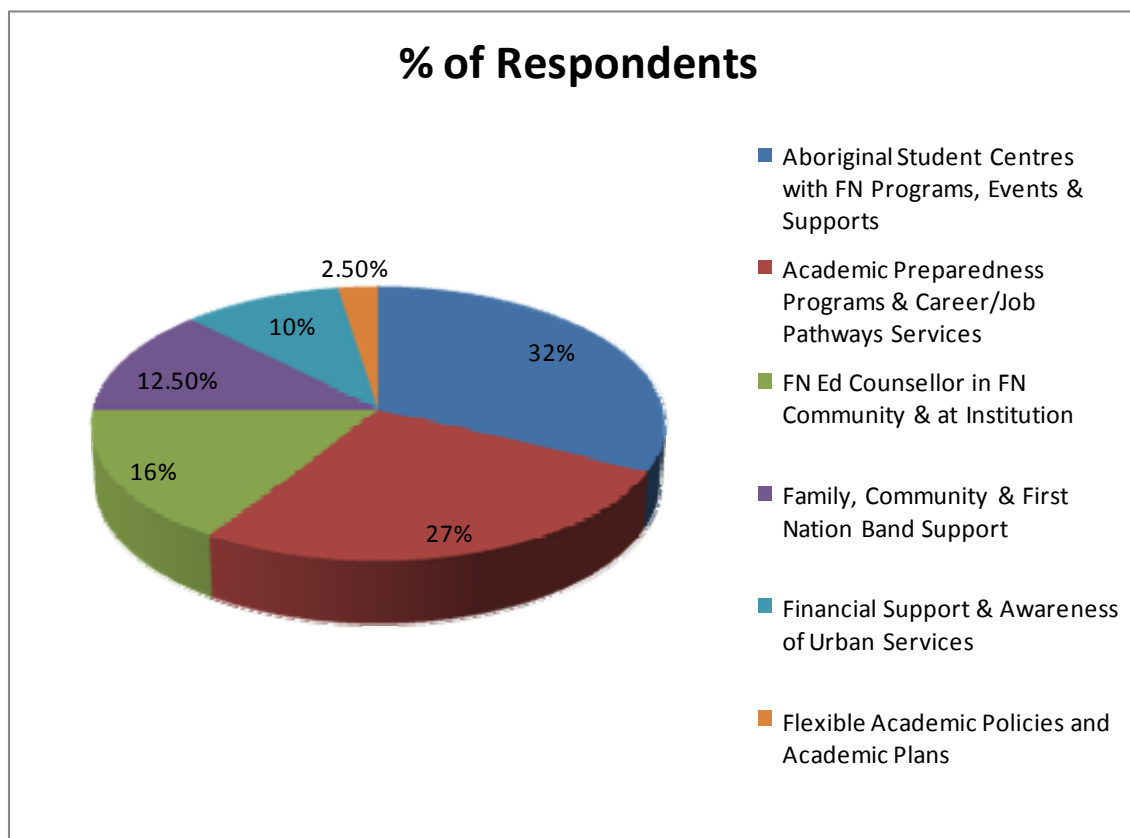
3D Pie Chart 1 – Kindergarten to Grade 8 Aboriginal Student Retention Practices



3D Pie Chart 2 – Grade 9 to Grade 12 Aboriginal Student Retention Practices



3D Pie Chart 3 – Post-Secondary Aboriginal Student Retention Practices



9. Aboriginal Student Transitions

Transitions and Aboriginal Student Success

Transition is defined as the strategies, programs, policies, curriculum and resources that make Aboriginal student changes from pre-school to elementary, from elementary to secondary, from secondary to post-secondary and between post-secondary institutions seamless. It is the activities, events, people, values, support systems and environment that makes these progressions between all levels effortless and comfortable. Transition is solely about Aboriginal students having the tools and skills to move confidently between these educational levels (ONECA Education and Training Partnerships Survey, 2009).

Pre-School to Elementary (JK/SK/1) Transition practices for Aboriginal students do include:

- Celebration of transitions (graduation) with parent/community input and involvement
- Parent and community engagement with daycare and elementary school events and programs - family literacy centres (Ball & Pence, 2001)

- Visits to Kindergarten class (jump ahead day) and collaborative programming (events) between locations of preschool and elementary
- Full time Native Education Counsellor and daycare staff and JK/SK staff working together to plan activities
- School's cool program and the development of Individual Plans for students (academic, social, mental, cultural, language)
- Aboriginal Headstart programs and Early Years Screening and Identification (Dunning, 2000)
- School bus orientation and ride the big bus days

Elementary to Secondary Transition practices for Aboriginal students do include:

- Visits to the high school and tours, as well as meet the staff over a meal
- Mentorship and buddy programs with current high school students (go to them and they come to the elementary level) to discuss high school courses, challenges and options (Ruttan, 2000)
- Relationship with the full time Native Education Counsellor that offers social, cultural, mental and academic programming in a designated space
- Parental and community involvement with events that celebrate the transitions (graduation and incentives and events)
- Orientation to high school extra-curricular activities (social, physical, academic) and organize shared events between elementary/secondary
- Career guidance plans at elementary that drive course selection in secondary (Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, 2007)
- Assist students with course selection at secondary and take to high school in august to locate classes before the year begins

Secondary to Post-Secondary Transition practices for Aboriginal students do include:

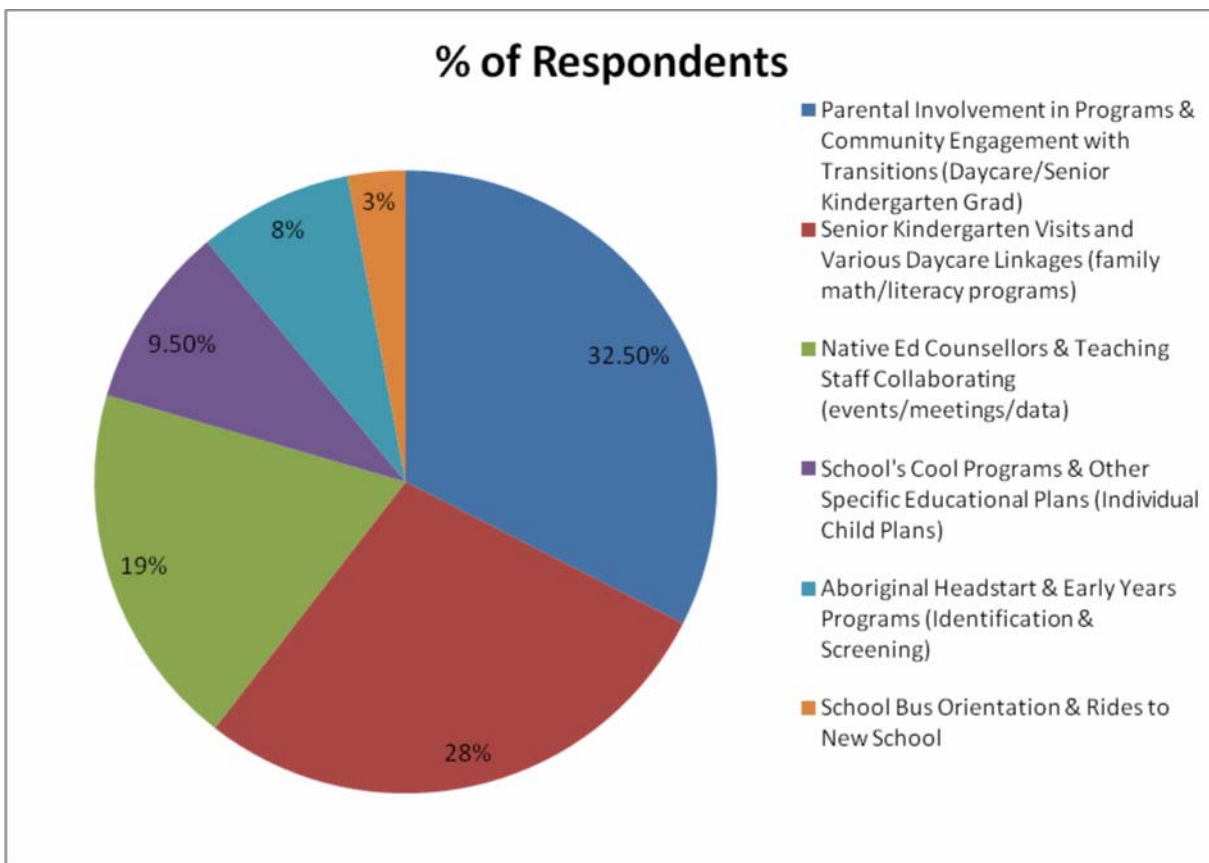
- Excursions to post-secondary institutions and attend events that are program oriented
- Attend career fairs that are diverse and located near or on post-secondary institutes
- Provision of workshops on academic success, independent living and services offered in the urban setting (Ward & Bouvier, 2001)
- Parental and community involvement with events that celebrate the transitions (graduation and incentives and events)
- Orientation to the Aboriginal Student Services at the Post-Sec level and introduction to their full time Native Education Counsellor
- Development and implementation of a Career Pathway plan for individual students from the Secondary guidance department - program selection, courses, options (Sloane-Seale, Wallace & Levin , 2001)
- Offering of workshops on bursaries and scholarships for FN students that assists them with the application process for post-secondary entry

Post-Secondary to Post-Secondary Transition practices do include:

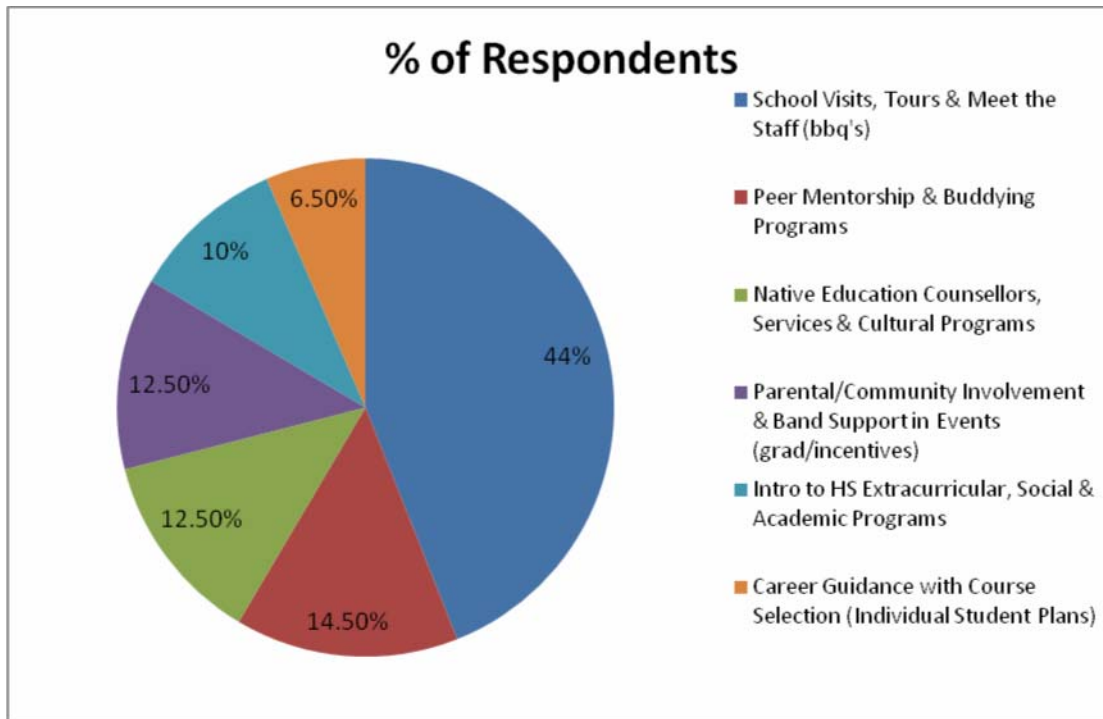
- Visits and tours to post-secondary institutions that offer specific programs identified in the educational plan of the student
- Workshops on career paths/job readiness/job selection, self-esteem and academic skills (Hull, 2000)
- Orientation to programs that have articulation agreements with each other (may affect selection of pathway)
- Offering of workshops on bursaries and scholarships for Aboriginal students and assist with the application process
- Introduction to Aboriginal Student Services (programs, events, peoples) at these institutions and meet the full time Native Education Counsellor
- Family and community involvement with transition celebrations (graduation)

Results of Survey

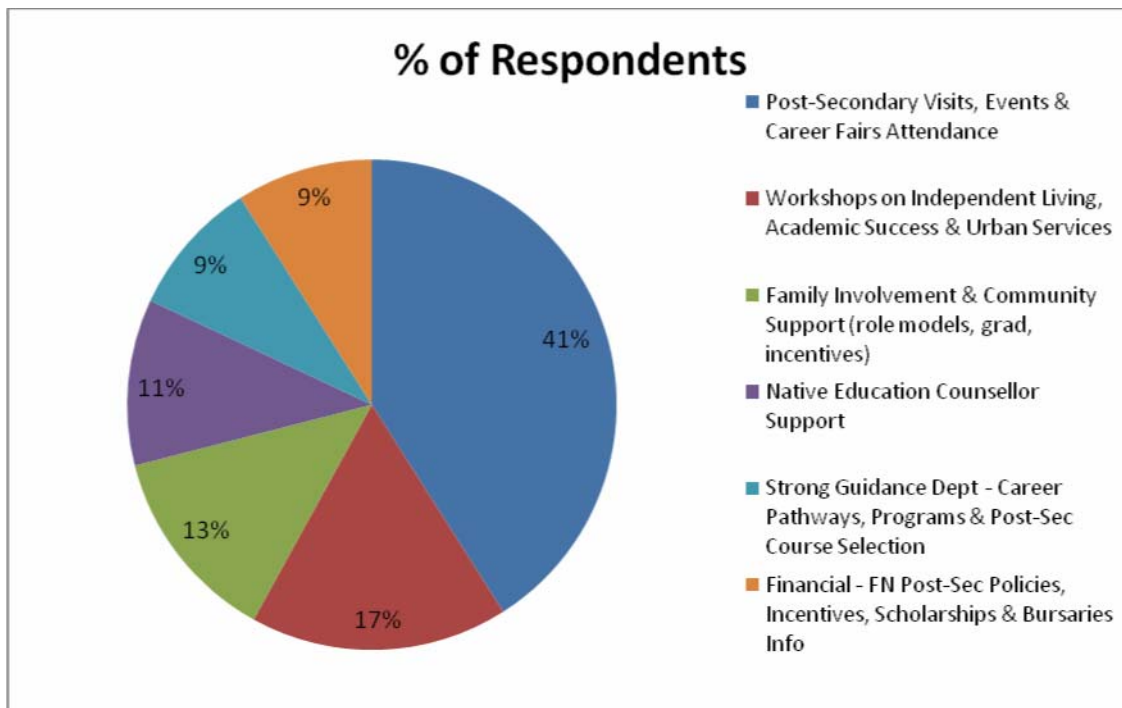
Pie Chart 4 – Transition Practices for Aboriginal Students from Pre-School to Elementary



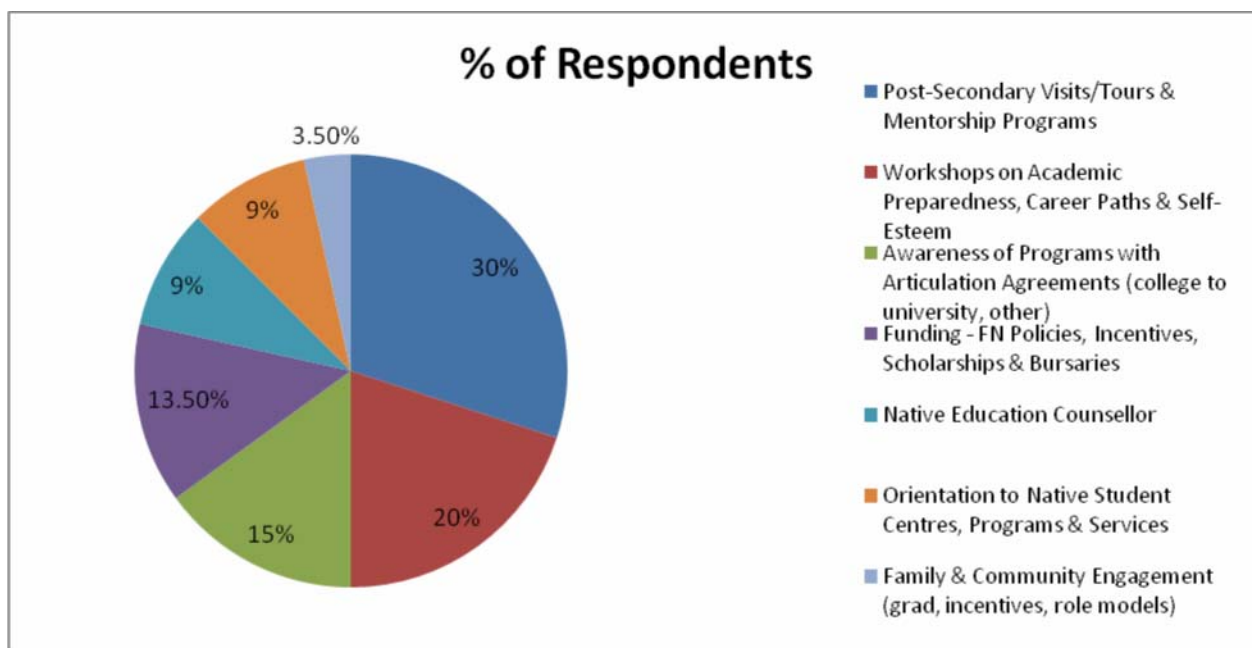
Pie Chart 5 – Transition Practices for Aboriginal Students from Elementary to Secondary



Pie Chart 6 – Transition Practices for Aboriginal Students from Secondary to Post-Secondary



Pie Chart 7 – Transition Practices for Aboriginal Students from Post-Secondary to Post-Secondary



10. Aboriginal Graduation Rates

Graduation Factors and Aboriginal Student Success

Graduation is defined as the successful completion of a level of schooling. This means that the Aboriginal student has received a certificate, a license, a diploma or degree as a record of this accomplishment from that education institution (elementary school, high school, adult education centre, alternative education centre, college, university, apprenticeship training, Aboriginal Educational Institute, private school, other). Graduation is solely about the Aboriginal student meeting the requirements of a program and finishing it (ONECA Education and Training Partnerships Survey, 2009).

Factors Affecting Aboriginal Student Graduation at the elementary level does include:

- Supportive school environments that have culturally enhancing programs and competent staff that are sensitive to their needs (Gallagher-Hayashi, 2004)
- Demonstrated plans of parental involvement and community engagement in the school and events, especially grad
- Academic preparedness levels are matched with self-esteem of the student – motivated to go on to the next level (Toulouse, 2007)
- Promotion and distribution of incentives for performance, behaviour and attendance
- Support of a full time Native Education Counsellor and his/her ethical space resources

Factors Affecting Aboriginal Student Graduation at the secondary level does include:

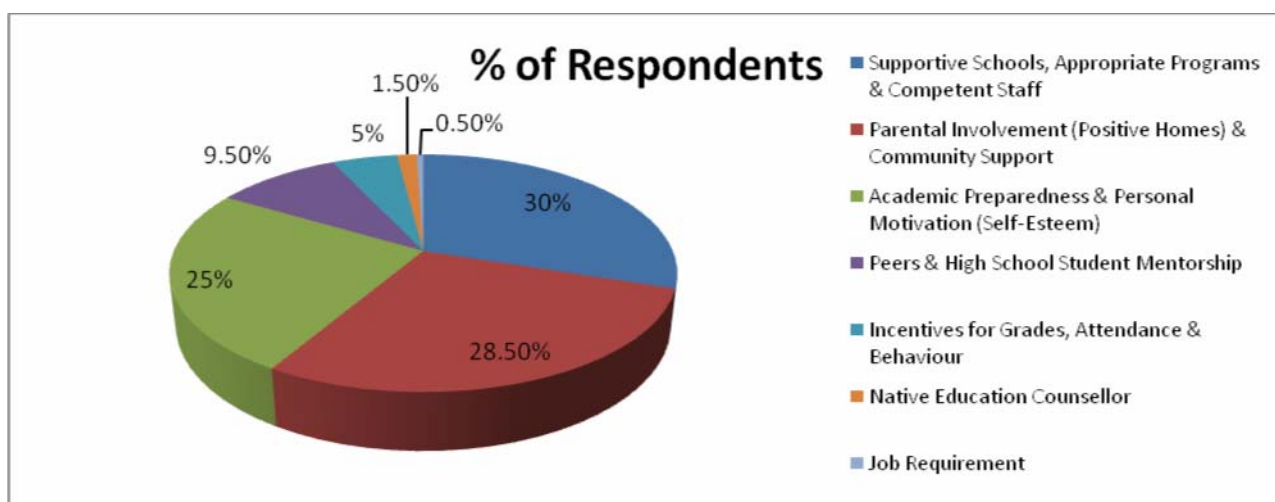
- Parents and families are role models as graduates themselves and the community is engaged in the graduation ceremonies of the students (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000)
- Planning and promotion of a clear pathway towards a program (career) that is supported by academic preparedness and self-esteem
- School is supportive with culturally relevant programs and culturally safe staff (Bazylak, 2002)
- Peer and social influences have been positive or the student has great problem solving skills
- Support of a full time Native Education Counsellor and his/her ethical space resources
- Enforced that this is a requirement for jobs and next level attainment

Factors Affecting Aboriginal Student Graduation at the post-secondary level does include:

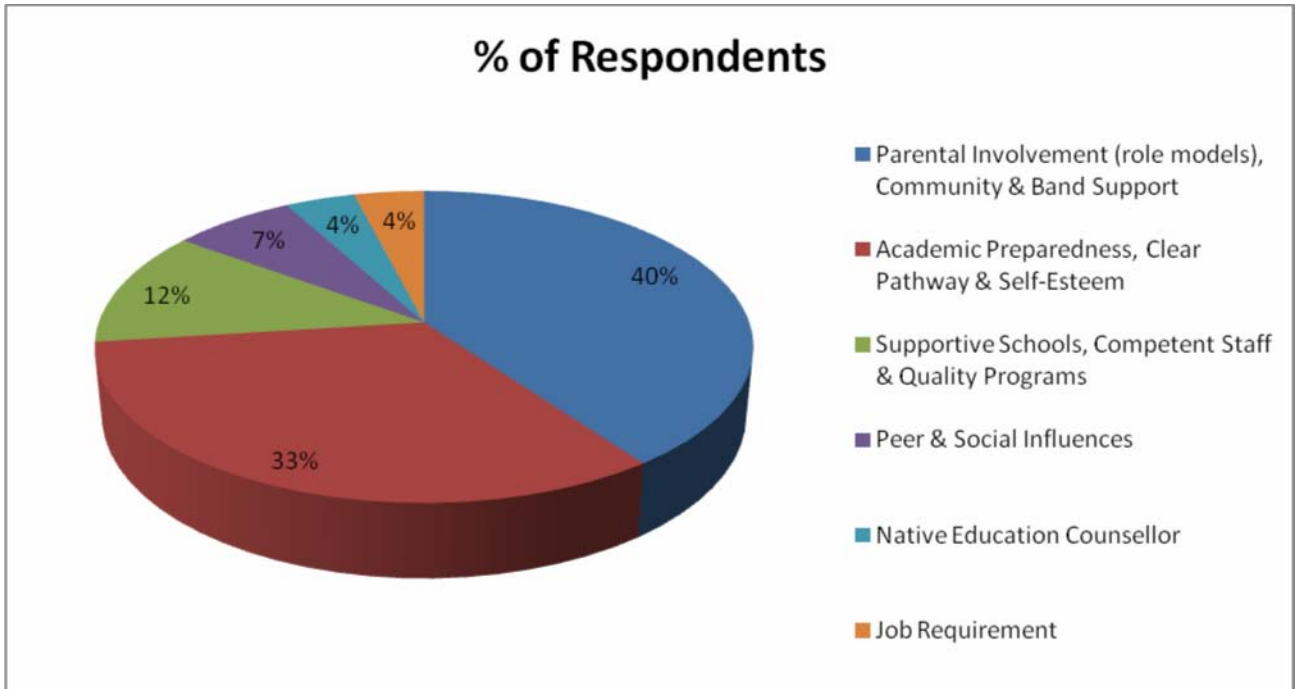
- Planned and implemented a clear pathway that had a specific program and career identified (King, 2008)
- Parents are supportive and role models as graduates and the community is engaged in graduation ceremonies for the students
- Good management and alternative access (scholarships & bursaries) to financial resources for adequate housing, transportation, childcare, technology and class materials
- Utilization of Aboriginal Student Services and the support of the Native Education Counsellor (on-campus and in home community)
- Culturally supportive institution and staff (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000)
- Reinforcement of job market demands and preparation for workforce

Results of Survey

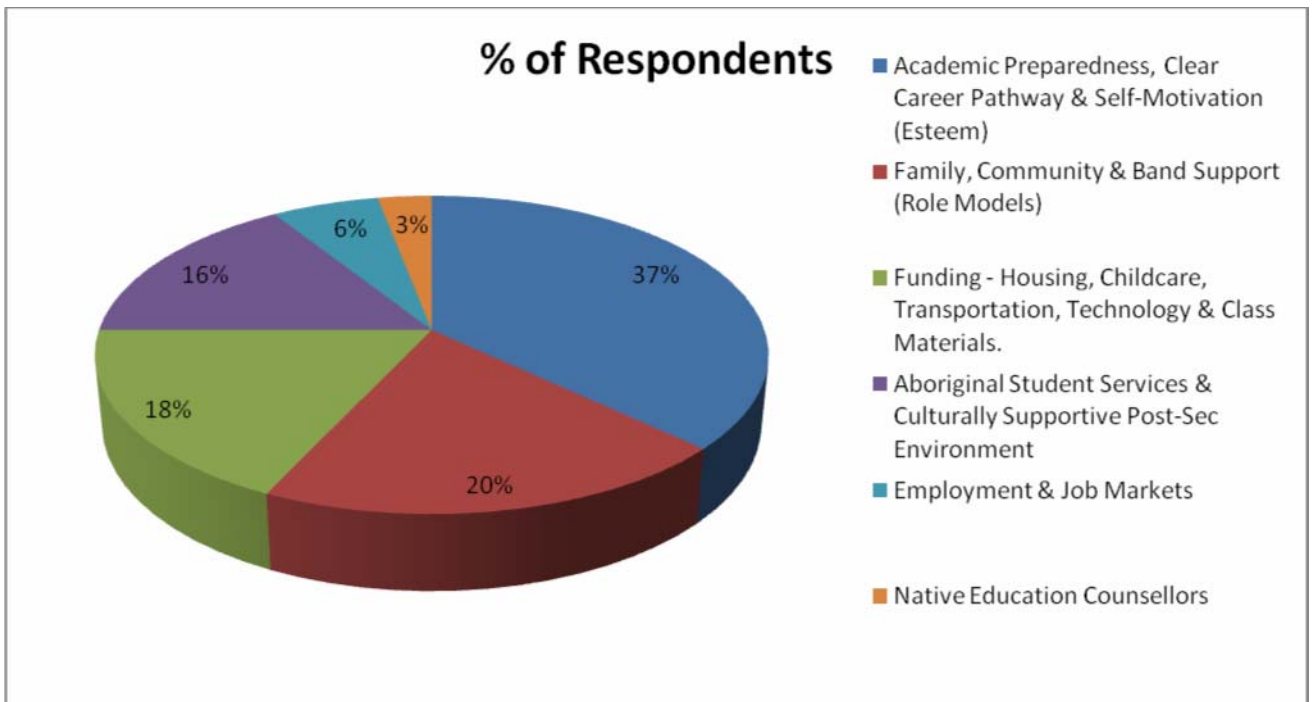
3D Pie Chart 4 – Aboriginal Elementary School Students and Factors Affecting Graduation



3D Pie Chart 5 – Aboriginal Secondary School Students and Factors Affecting Graduation



3D Pie Chart 6 – Aboriginal Post-Secondary School Students and Factors Affecting Graduation



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APPENDIX

About the Author

Dr. Pamela Rose Toulouse (B.A. – Lakehead, B.Ed. – Nipissing, M.Ed. – Brock, Ph.D. – University of British Columbia) is a professor in the School of Education (English Concurrent Program) at Laurentian University. Originally from the community of Sagamok Anishnawbek, she is a proud Ojibwe/Odawa woman who comes from a long line of educators. She celebrates 17 years of activity in the formal educational setting, beginning as an elementary school teacher and then finding herself in the role of colleague within higher education. Dr. Toulouse is known for her contributions in the area of Aboriginal curriculum development and was the lead writer for the Shki-Mawtch-Taw-Win-En-Mook (Path to New Beginnings) Project, a nationally acclaimed series that honours First Peoples and upholds critical educational standards. Dr. Toulouse continues her life journey in the field of education by representing her Nation in a respectful and meaningful way.

