

## **Report on Métis Education in Ontario's K-12 Schools**

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## **Executive summary**

In 2001, Statistics Canada noted that there were over 26,200 Métis students in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools. In 2006, Statistics Canada found close to a 40 percent increase in the Métis population in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education's "Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework," released in 2007, (hereafter referred to as the "Framework"), provides direction to boards of education and schools about supports for Métis education (Ontario, Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Office 2007b). The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) was fully engaged in the development of the "Framework." In 2008, the MNO released "A Métis Education Action Plan" and signed a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the ministry in 2009; both aim to improve Métis educational outcomes, as well as ensuring all Ontarians learn about Métis in Ontario. In order to understand how Métis education is doing in Ontario, researchers reviewed existing literature and surveyed schools to identify initiatives connected to the "Framework" that support Métis student achievement and self-identification. This report on Métis education in Ontario is the first in-depth analysis of the state of Métis education in the province.

The research methodology used in this study consisted of a literature review, online survey, site visits, and interviews. Researchers sent out a survey to all school boards in Ontario. The literature was subjected to a comprehensive search for published reports, studies, and academic papers concerning Métis and Aboriginal<sup>3</sup> education in general. The focus was on Ontario and all of Canada. Literature was divided into grey and academic. Grey literature included reports from school boards and reports by government departments and agencies. Researchers found nine Métis-specific published and unpublished papers, conference presentations, book chapters, and reports. There were thirty-five overall, on Aboriginal education. The Ontario-specific literature on Métis education is non-existent, making this report an invaluable start in understanding Métis education in Ontario. Survey questions were based on gathering information on the progress school boards have made to implement the "Framework" initiatives (self-identification, advisory committees, courses, and so on). The survey was sent electronically, in English and in French, to

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<sup>3</sup> In several policy documents, the term "Aboriginal" is used as an umbrella term for First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. We use the term "Aboriginal" sparingly in this report, to draw close attention to Métis learners and staff in Ontario's schools and to recognize that Indigenous peoples prefer to be referred to by their respective nations (i.e., the Métis nation). Therefore, we want to illustrate that there are differences between and among Indigenous peoples in Ontario, of whom the Métis are part.

school boards with a letter introducing the research from the ministry. Thirty-three completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 43 percent. Of the thirty-three completed surveys, Catholic boards' responses were the highest, at about 48 percent, followed by English public boards at 44 percent, French Catholic boards' responses, near 42 percent, with French public boards at 40 percent.<sup>4</sup> The survey was initially sent on February 7, 2011, and follow-up e-mails to non-respondents were sent approximately three weeks later, on February 28 and March 1, asking these individuals to complete the survey by Friday, March 4.

Site visits and oral interviews were conducted to document promising initiatives at Ontario schools at the curricular level and/or in collaboration with Métis community members. Site visits and interviews provided the opportunity to view, in depth, promising practices and to discuss challenges and opportunities to implementing existing policies, practices, and knowledge exchange and transfer opportunities. In total, two informal site visits were conducted, whereby we were able to participate in Métis-focused activities and learn more about the context of the work being done in schools, and five semi-structured interviews were completed with Indigenous education leads and coordinators affiliated with five school boards.

### *Key findings*

Key findings are divided into promising practices and challenges. A challenge is any activity or policy that is developing or needs to be passed to help bring about transformation and changes in education involving Métis learners. Challenges are addressed when educators concentrate on the achievement and self-identification of Métis children and youth, making spaces to foster the awareness of Indigenous peoples/knowledge/history that the "Framework" strives to help bring about. Promising practices are still new but seem to be exhibiting beneficial pedagogical results.

The key findings from the data collected are enumerated throughout the report. Whenever possible, we share the voices of the directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff. We frame the data within a larger narrative of hope for change, building inclusive educational environments that honour Métis learners and their respective knowledge systems, worldviews, and epistemologies.

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<sup>4</sup> A response rate that is higher than 20 percent is considered typical and fairly robust for mail-out surveys.

### *Promising practices*

Several promising practices emerge from our research, which address pedagogical, curricular, and staffing needs. All are supported by the ministry's foundational principles of success for all students. Each addresses the importance of awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Métis knowledge, history, learners, families, and communities in Ontario's schools. The following practices emerge from the data that we have collected.

- School boards with Aboriginal education leads, such as Aboriginal education officers, coordinators, vice-principals, and/or teachers do much better than those without
- Consistent and authentic Métis community representation, formally on Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees or Aboriginal Education Advisory Circles and informally through parental involvement and teacher engagement, increases Métis awareness and self-identification
- School boards that provide dedicated resources to facilitate professional development for teachers and staff are experiencing success in implementing many aspects of the "Framework"
- School boards that engage key Métis community educators to teach Métis knowledge, history, and culture aimed at students, staff, teachers, vice-principals and principals, superintendents, and directors are creating positive teaching and learning opportunities for all.

### *Challenges*

There is a lack of awareness in many schools and within school boards of Métis history and culture. Several school boards indicate that initiatives to raise awareness among staff are only in their earliest phases, and they have asked for more assistance from the Ministry of Education to support their programs, practices, and curriculum enhancements. School board participants share the following instructive recommendations.

- Supplementary and curricular resources that speak to the Métis experience and are based on Métis perspectives still need to be developed. These tools need to aim to broaden the appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the place of Métis people in the historical and contemporary life of Canada. A lack of resources hinders the implementation of promising

practices, pedagogically as well as collaboratively (enhanced relationships between Métis councils/communities and schools and school boards)

- Some boards feel as though they do not have regular access to Métis councils, community members, teachers, Senators/Elders/Old ones, and knowledge holders. Therefore, connections need to be forged with councils and Métis knowledge holders and resource people
- Some boards have not embraced the 2007 policy mandate and have yet to provide professional development concerning Métis issues
- Projects are limited by the number of key people, sometimes volunteers, and the application of special one-time grants. Often boards are stressed for staff who can garner community and institutional support, function at all levels of project management, and communicate results to a wider audience. Some boards are fortunate to have Aboriginal education staff or allies who can infuse the curriculum with Indigenous perspectives and/or can successfully work with Métis community leaders to enrich the curricular experiences for students and educators. Similarly, some school boards have grant writers and/or staff able to write first-rate applications for funding, but not all do.

### *Recommendations*

Based on the survey findings, interviews, and a review of the literature on Métis education, we recommend that action be taken by the following stakeholders:

#### *The Ministry of Education should,*

- Invest, through consistent instructional grants and programs, in professional development and collaborative opportunities, re: Métis initiatives in boards
- Provide school boards with dedicated resources for Métis education
- Gather self-identification data and Métis student achievement data and work with the MNO to ensure the appropriate dissemination of this information to the public
- Increase dedicated staff throughout the ministry who can provide support and leadership on Métis education. Currently, education officers responsible, in full and in part, for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education initiatives fulfill this role, but not all school boards have education officers and/or not all have connections to Métis

- Develop a curriculum review and writing process that infuses Métis knowledge, perspectives, and experiences for all grades and subject matter. At least two school boards are doing infusions through their curriculum, but the practice is not uniform across all school boards in the province
- Develop a database, possibly in the form of a cyber-library of curricula, lesson plans, and promising practices for teachers to use in classrooms that can be accessed by all educators
- Continue to monitor the implementation of the “Framework” in all boards, publishing these findings.

*The school boards should,*

- Assign funds in their operating budgets to ensure money spent on professional development includes Métis education, so that teachers can infuse Métis knowledge across the curriculum
- Coordinate lead staff in boards to ensure professional development opportunities for all educators to implement the 2007 “Framework”
- Emphasize the needs of the whole child—spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical
- Support all students to become resilient citizens with an informed awareness of the Métis Nation and the history and legacy of colonization
- Work with the Métis community to develop curriculum for all learners—Métis and non-Métis—that depicts Métis history accurately, shares an understanding of the history of colonization, as well as contemporary challenges, and pays critical attention to the evolving definitions of Métis identities (cultural/legal/local/national)
- Create a space for Métis students, families, and communities in schools to share and celebrate their history, culture, perspectives, and knowledge with everyone
- Recognize that there are a plurality of interpretations and experiences of Métis culture shared among students, families, and school board staff
- Welcome Métis Senators, Elders, knowledge holders, and community members into classrooms and schools to help educate staff and learners on topics relevant to Métis knowledge and heritage in curricula
- Encourage Métis family members, especially parents, to visit schools regularly, acting as helpers, resource people, role models, and consultants to help improve Métis student self-identification, attendance, achievement, pride, and academic success

- Connect employers and post-secondary institutions in the board's region to Métis youth to support employment and training
- Enhance hiring policies to employ Métis as directors, superintendents, principals, vice-principals, teachers, liaison officers, social workers, etc. in English and French and public and Catholic boards
- Ensure that all students and staff recognize the importance of Métis education and perspectives and are aware of all Métis initiatives in school boards, especially those flowing from the "Framework".

*The Métis Nation of Ontario, Education and Training Branch (MNOET) should,*

- Continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Education on implementation of the "Framework" and related initiatives
- Continue to independently monitor the implementation of the 2007 "Framework" and provide the ministry with updates in a timely fashion
- Work with the Ministry of Education to develop and review curriculum and supplementary resources that reflect Métis histories and contemporary Métis identities
- Work with the ministry to develop an accessible electronic database to connect school boards and teachers around the province with Métis educational philosophies, curricula, and practices. The ministry needs to take financial responsibility for this initiative, supplying administrative personnel with expertise in such educational technologies
- Ensure Métis knowledge, perspectives, and histories are valued and preserved for current and future generations, including the Michif language
- Build relationships with boards to identify and address educational experiences in school, enhancing curricula to reflect more accurately Métis history
- Work with community members to build a critical mass of Métis resource people—Anglophone, Francophone and Michif--to be present in schools.

Overall, there is no single initiative that ensures and, similarly, could prevent the inclusion of Métis education in Ontario schools. The research indicates, in all of the challenges and promising practices, that there has to be both trust and willingness on the part of both the formal educational system as well as the Métis community to work collaboratively to ensure inclusion



takes place. Moreover, the best initiatives reinforce the foundational principle of relationships and relationship building. Métis student achievement and self-identification are significant goals. Learning about historical and contemporary Métis people in Ontario enriches the lives of not only Métis youth but all learners and educators. The infusion of Métis perspectives, knowledge, and history helps to ensure that the legacy of colonial education and the systemic silence surrounding Métis identities does not continue in Ontario's educational system.

Finally, we recognize that more research is needed. It is particularly important to find out why roughly 56 percent of school boards did not participate in the research and why some school boards decline to implement self-identification policies. Overall, there is a need to understand what stages different school boards across the province are in, concerning their relationships with the "Framework".

We are grateful to the following stakeholders for their contributions to this report. The Métis Nation of Ontario shared financial and human resources to support us as we conducted this investigation. We thank, in particular, Chris Paci, Chris McLeod, Guylaine Morin-Cleroux, and Jennifer St. Germain. As well, our appreciation is extended to the Ministry of Education for informing the school boards that the study was underway. And, most importantly, we are grateful to the school board survey respondents and school board staff who have participated in formal and informal interviews and conversations with us.

## Introduction

### Project overview

In 2001, Statistics Canada noted that there were over 26,200 Métis students in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools. Within five years the provincial Métis population had grown 40 percent (Statistics Canada 2006). The Métis population is on average younger than the Canadian average. While Ontario has the second largest Métis provincial population in Canada, not much is known about Métis people, and little is taught in Ontario's Aboriginal<sup>5</sup> curriculum. With the implementation of school board self-identification policies, a more accurate profile of the Métis student body should be complete by sometime between 2013 and 2016, when the Ontario Ministry of Education reports its Ontario Education Numbers. Self-identification policies in school boards are part of the 2007 "Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework" (hereafter referred to as the "Framework"), which provides direction to boards of education and schools about supports for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education (Ontario, Ministry of Education 2007b). The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) was fully engaged in the development of the *Framework*. In 2008, the MNO released the "Métis Education Action Plan" and signed a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the ministry in 2009 (The Métis Nation of Ontario 2008). The plan and the MOU aim to improve Métis educational outcomes, as well as ensuring all Ontarians have effective resources to learn about Métis in the province. To understand the effectiveness of Métis education, as seen through the lenses of the "Framework", we surveyed school boards, administrators, and teachers to identify the initiatives connected to the "Framework" that support Métis student achievement and self-identification.

In 2010, as part of the MOU implementation of its work plan with the MNO, the Ministry of Education provided funds to the MNO to research Métis educational opportunities, promising practices, and challenges in Ontario. The MNO hired us to comment on policies, practices, and curricula supporting Métis student achievement and self-identification. This report is the culmination of that work.

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<sup>5</sup> In several policy documents the term "Aboriginal" is used as an umbrella term for First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. We use the term "Aboriginal" sparingly in this report, to draw close attention to Métis learners and staff in Ontario's schools and to recognize that Indigenous peoples do prefer to be referred to by their respective nations (i.e., the Métis nation) and actual heritages. Therefore, we want to illustrate that there are differences between and among Indigenous peoples in Ontario, of whom the Métis are a distinct group.

**Education: the new canoe**

For First Nations in Canada, post-secondary education (PSE) has been called “the new buffalo” (Stonechild 2006, 1). In many ways, for the Métis in Ontario, education is the new canoe.<sup>6</sup> In other words, like the canoe that carries many different people who work together for common goals, so the educational system is seen as the means by which Métis people and their allies can journey together to advance, socially and economically, in the new millennium, while respecting that indeed there is a rich history of Métis learning that predates the inception of the modern school system. This metaphor accurately depicts K-12 education and higher learning for Métis as it relates to: accessibility, adequate financial resources, supportive teachers/faculty and staff, and integration of Métis knowledge in today's classroom teaching. Canadian and provincial/territorial governments agree that improving the educational achievement of Métis students is a positive advance for all Canadians. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC 2007), for example, highlights this in *CMEC's Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Education*, as do the Association of Canadian Deans of Education in their *Accord on Indigenous Education* (ACDE 2010). However, implementation of these high level policies requires resources and meaningful changes to current practices that are suitable, sustainable, relevant, and respectful of Métis.

This research on program supports to support Métis learners' achievement and self-identification in Ontario's schools is timely. In 2006, there were 35,000 Métis children in Canada ready to start school (i.e., under the age of 6), with 89 percent of these children residing in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories. Thirty-three percent of Métis preschool children participate in at least one traditional activity, singing, drum dancing, or traditional ceremonies, and 74 percent are involved in camping, hunting, fishing, berry picking, or gathering

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<sup>6</sup> The canoe is a powerful metaphor for Métis people. Kearns, a Métis person, at a Métis celebration in the summer of 2011 in Ontario, spoke to an Elder who shared that the canoe is symbolic for the Métis in Ontario. The discussion resonates with lessons from the research, as both Kearns and Anuik, a Métis ally and historian, have been honoured to learn from Marcel Labelle. Labelle's building of what he terms as “Our Knowledge Canoe” conveys lessons in Métis knowledge. We have, in our site visits to the Durham District School Board (DDSB) and through our participation in the Oshawa-Durham Métis Council celebrations, in particular, the June (2011) celebration, been able to learn foundations of Métis learning through the building of the canoe. Similarly, the Annual General Meeting (AGA) hosted revered Elders and the president of the MNO, and they came to this summer's AGA gathering place via canoe. The canoe is powerful for contemporary Métis people and has been integral to the lives of our ancestors. For Métis people, the metaphors that can be extended to the canoe and education are many. Within the scope of this report it is not possible to story them all, but we invite people to consider many aspects of the canoe journey physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

wild plants. Thirty-three percent of Métis children have someone in the family who can provide Métis history, with roughly 20 percent having regular contact with grandparents and extended family members (Guèvremont 2010). Even though a slight majority of Métis children and youth have strong family support systems, challenges continue to stall Métis success in the formal school system. Nevertheless, new opportunities to promote family health and wellness are emerging, and school boards are becoming more aware of a distinct Métis past and contemporary presence in Ontario. The time to have pedagogy and curricula that reflects Métis histories and contemporary Métis identities in Ontario's schools is now.

### **The “Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework”**

The Ontario Ministry of Education released the “Framework” to ensure that educational changes take place to support Métis learners' success in Ontario's K-12 schools. In addition, it mandates all K-12 students to “have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives” (Ontario, Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Office 2007, 7). The Ministry of Education, in the “Framework”, recommends that boards collect data based on voluntary self-identification of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners to support student achievement and innovations in foundations, curricula, practices, governance, and policy development at the board level. The preliminary data that boards have begun to gather (to 2011 and only for those participating boards) is used in the current paper to understand Métis education challenges, opportunities, and promising practices. In turn, this paper contributes to support for Métis student achievement and self-identification in Ontario.

According to some participating board representatives, the “Framework” and the financial commitments accompanying it set in motion a process of transformation of local, school-based initiatives in curricula, pedagogy, and administration into province-wide strategies to support Métis student achievement and self-identification (Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board [SMCDSB], interview 2011). For those boards implementing the “Framework”, there have been a host of activities aimed at achievement of its goals. The “Framework” has set up a template for schools to encourage formal involvement from the Métis communities.

Furthermore, since 2007, some teachers, support staff, coordinators, vice-principals and

principals, and superintendents have been reassigned or hired into positions whose whole or partial focus is on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educational initiatives. These activities have included: facilitating self-identification of Métis learners; revising curricula; supporting student achievement; and nurturing relationships with community agencies and members. In some boards, there are now teachers responsible for Indigenous education situated at every elementary and secondary school. School board representatives attribute their successes at this point to dedicated staff—administrative and instructional—responsible for infusion of Indigenous pedagogy, including Métis knowledge and perspectives.

The “Framework” is a blueprint to guide boards as they strive to build inclusive and supportive environments for Métis learners and their families. It is up to each school to strategize, though, in concert with Métis community members, on how best to achieve the guidelines. From the research we found, there is a consensus from boards throughout the province that improving school-home relationships is foundational to the achievement of the “Framework”’s goals. School board representatives reported that they understand clearly the educational goals that Métis families have for their children and youth and thus want to reflect these goals in their relationships with Métis in the boards’ regions.

A fundamental issue that boards identify is the need to build trust with Métis families and communities. Some community members’ experienced firsthand the effects of Indian Residential Schools while others were affected negatively by the racism in public and Catholic school systems, as well as private Catholic schools (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Anuik 2009, Brent Tookenay, interview 2011). A number of government policies negatively affected, directly or indirectly, Métis perceptions of Ontario’s schools. Provincial public, English and French, and Catholic schools were not always encouraging spaces for Métis learning (Anuik 2010b, Kearns 2010). The legacy of colonialism has resulted in teachers, at times, denying respectful portrayals of Métis identities in schools (if they were present at all). This context needs to be renegotiated to create hospitable educational spaces for Métis youth and families (Kearns in press).

School-community relationships have been formalized through the establishment of Aboriginal Education Advisory Councils (AEACs) and/or Aboriginal Education Advisory Circles (AEA

Circles),<sup>7</sup> as the “Framework” recommends. The AEACs and AEA Circles have responded to recommendations from the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with school boards, these bodies have revised and, in some cases, developed self-identification policies, forms, and information sheets (i.e., brochures and fact sheets). Sometimes Elders’ advisory councils have formed in school boards, and Métis Elders and Senators have participated in knowledge exchange activities and sharing exercises (SMCDSB, interview 2011). Some Métis community members have been consulted formally by these bodies to ensure the process is generative. AEACs and AEA Circles are also often responsible for the facilitation of discussion on supports of Métis learners and they guide infusion of Métis knowledge and perspectives across school curricula. While far from consistent across all councils and circles, some boards have strong Métis representation and they have initiated professional development sessions under the direction of key Métis educators. Informally, the councils and circles are engaging Métis parents and involving Métis teachers in practices to facilitate Métis student achievement and self-identification.

Métis learners, like all learners, need to feel a sense of attachment to their schools. Parents also need to feel comfortable enough in schools to speak frankly with administrators (vice-principals and principals), as well as teachers and staff. This is an important priority for all partners in education, from policy makers and teachers to students and their families. As the number of Métis learners in Ontario’s schools continues to grow, and as Ontarians continue to want the best education for their children, the need for good Métis foundations and content continues to increase. School board directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff are well placed to both teach and learn from Métis students. Ultimately, most educators need to be more aware, having the support of curricular material and the community to enhance their teaching practices.

The Ministry of Education has invested in professional development for some teachers, as part of its commitments in the “Framework”, with the support of the directors and superintendents,

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<sup>7</sup> The *Framework* recommends to boards how to reach out to the Métis community, suggesting the formation of Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees (AEACs). A few of these committees opted to change their names to Aboriginal Education Advisory Circles (AEA Circles). The DDSB uses “circle” in its advisory body’s name because it better reflects the Indigenous nature of the relationship and connections of educators, allies, and community members collaborating and learning from one another on a good educational path.

enabling these teachers to begin to better address the myriad of issues connected to achievement and self-identification of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners. To what extent there is to be greater opportunities for professional development of all teachers in the future depends on a number of factors, including resources. Along with the funding to support staffing, the ministry must continue to support the holistic needs of Métis learners and their families while finding metrics to ensure the “Framework” goals are being met.

### **Métis learners**

There were 389,785 people in Canada who self-identified as Métis in the 2006 Census. This number represents a 91 percent increase from the statistics reported in 1996. As of 2011, Métis make up 34 percent of the total Indigenous population in Canada. In 2001, Statistics Canada reported that Métis are 26 percent of the total Indigenous population of Ontario. 26,200 Métis attended K-12 schools in Ontario in 2001. In the same year, the Ottawa-Gatineau area was identified as having the largest urban population of Métis in central Canada. Other major centers in Ontario with large Métis populations include Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Timmins, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Hamilton, Midland, and Fort Frances. In 2011, there are thirty-four Métis community councils in Ontario. We would, therefore, expect to find good and longstanding relations in those areas that have large Métis populations; however, demographics are only one indicator, and there is no correlation between good relations with schools and the size of the Métis population. Additional factors come into play that we seek to understand, including the degree to which teachers and school administrators are aware of, and make the conscious effort to include, Métis educators and education in their schools.

Addressing systemic racism is considered a key educational goal in Ontario. Safe and unsafe learning environments affect Métis student self-perception. The negation of Métis identity and history contributes to an unsafe and racist learning environment where teachers misinform students on Métis history or ignore it altogether. Further, Métis student self-esteem is affected negatively by the legacy of racism--it puts inter-generational pressure on Métis children and youth to conceal their Indigenous ancestries (Absolon and Willett 2005, Anuik 2009, Belisle 2006, Kearns in press). Métis youth are caught in a dilemma, in particular, when it comes to “Aboriginal” programming. Métis are often treated by others as being either too First Nation or

too European, or not enough of either (Anuik 2009, Lawrence 2004, St. Denis 2007). Student success initiatives need to build from an awareness of the contemporary reality of racism and its historical origins. Addressing racism and its legacy in the new millennium involves, in part, public education, with teachers and students learning about and addressing bias together. This requires a critical view of existing resources, reviewing inaccurate, misleading, and offensive information and inquiring about and discussing representation of Métis in curricula and academic books and in school. One of the notable consequences of misrepresentation of Métis in curricula and Aboriginal education initiatives is the credit achievement gap between Métis and their non-Indigenous peers in Ontario's schools. The gap is also a product of racism that contributes to lowered self-esteem (Tookenay, interview 2011).

Métis learners require safe spaces to fulfill their educational goals. Similarly, all learners require positive images of Métis to dispel old and outdated stereotypes. Fortunately, the research in this report captures a number of examples of initiatives being championed in Ontario classrooms, schools, and school boards that engage positively in Métis education.

As more Métis self-identify, the need to understand the historical and contemporary experiences of Métis learners and their families in the K-12 educational system and the engagement of teachers, vice-principals and principals, directors, superintendents, and staff in Métis education is crucial. The findings in this report provide readers with a view of Métis education in Ontario today, through a review of quantitative (self-identification numbers) and qualitative (records of programs and promising practices) data obtained from participating school boards. Paying close attention to the "Framework" and to the continuing and evolving goals of the ministry is necessary to determine the efficacy of investments in Métis education. Following a discussion of the research methods, we share the story of Métis education in Canada and then focus on Ontario to distil the salient themes that emerged from the research as they pertain to Métis learners and their families.

### **The report**

This report focuses on Métis education in Ontario in 2011, by researching the progress of the implementation of the "Framework". The authors discuss how it supports Métis students. We



document promising practices to support Métis awareness, which, in turn, may support, in part, student achievement and promote confidential voluntary self-identification. Reporting on promising classroom practices, rather than barriers, this report contributes to a supportive school environment for Métis identity, which is a crucial yardstick to measure Ministry of Education achievements. The report justifies future proposals to ensure initiatives designed to transform Métis pedagogy, curricula, and policies continue to develop and are sustainable in Ontario's K-12 schools. Similarly, we hope that initiatives connected to the "Framework", such as self-identification and supports to ensure achievement of Métis, do continue, with this report providing evidence-based data to justify the renewal of the principles and practices connected to the "Framework".

We are grateful to the following stakeholders for their contributions to this report. The Métis Nation of Ontario shared financial and human resources to support us as we conducted this investigation. We thank, in particular, Chris Paci, Manager of the MNO's Education and Training Branch, and MNO staff members Chris McLeod, Guylaine Morin-Cleroux, and Jennifer St. Germain. As well, our appreciation is extended to the Ministry of Education for informing the school boards that the study was underway. And, most importantly, we are grateful to the school board survey respondents and school board staff who have participated in formal and informal interviews and conversations with us.

## **Methodology**

### **Literature review**

The research occurred in several phases. Firstly, the literature was reviewed, focusing on Métis education. Literature was searched using the following keywords: Métis; Métis--Ontario; Métis--Canada--Study and Teaching (Higher); and Métis--Ontario--Education. The following databases and libraries were scrutinized: the Educational Resources Information Center and library catalogues at Lakehead University, St. Francis-Xavier University, University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, McGill University, Simon Fraser University, and Dalhousie University (Novanet). Researchers searched the report databases of the following research institutes: the Canadian Policy Research Networks, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy,

CMEC, the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, the Canadian Education Association, and the provincial and territorial teachers' federations and each ministry of education. Searches were made of publications by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Interlocutor Office for Métis and Non-status Indians. Finally, publications sections of the Métis National Council (MNC) and the provincial and territorial Métis organizations were searched, as well.

The literature was situated in the foundational studies of leading Indigenous scholars (Marie Battiste, Verna St. Denis, Carol Schick, Gregory Cajete, Leroy Little Bear, Judy Iseke, and many, many more). It was also necessary to consider groundbreaking foundational reports in Indigenous education in Canada, such as the section on Métis education in the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the "Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education" of 2000-2011, and "The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs: Kindergarten to Grade 12" of 2000. International literature such as "The UNESCO Seventh Consultation of Member States on the Implementation of the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination: Report for Canada" of 2007 was another substantive piece for consideration. When completing the literature review, we determined that much of the grey literature, and work done outside Ontario, had little to specifically offer on the topic of Métis education. In many ways, this report on Métis education in Ontario is leading the way.

The literature search, which was largely focused on Métis education, historically and contemporary, yielded few results. We considered scholarly work on "Aboriginal" education, including First Nation and Inuit education, by analyzing the findings from these studies through a Métis lens. The Métis are often absorbed under First Nations education, with the implication that the foundations and practices of all Indigenous groups are the same, without considering the diversity of, for example, Métis families and communities, and the great diversity between and among different Indigenous groups. Therefore, in all literature under consideration, we searched for insights on promising philosophies and practices to support Métis student achievement and self-identification in Ontario's schools, especially those findings that dovetail with the "Framework". When reviewing the literature, we asked the following questions:

- What are the educational supports and interventions available to Métis learners in Canadian schools?
- What supports are teachers given to help implement new curriculum relevant for Métis learners?
- What access do learners and teachers have to resources specifically focused on Métis knowledge, history, culture, and nationhood?
- What formats for teaching and evaluation of Métis knowledge exist?
- And what educational theories and models—western and Indigenous—exist to evaluate learners' competency in western and Métis knowledge and modes of thought?

The vast majority of scholarly work in Canada, and internationally, may use the language of Aboriginal education but it is focused on First Nation education. Much of it justifies the need for separate education systems run by and for First Nation peoples and for educational choice for Status First Nations families, in line with the 1972 National Indian Brotherhood policy statement, “Indian Control of Indian Education.” Because the body of original research investigating Métis learners in K-12 schools in the period ca. 1980-2011 is small, with no studies in Ontario, the above questions were pursued in the survey, site visits, and interviews with school boards in Ontario, enabling us to establish a baseline of research.

### **Survey of school boards in Ontario**

Because there is no previously published research documenting the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in Métis education in Ontario, it is necessary to conduct survey research to gather input from a number of knowledge holders, policy-makers, and practitioners. We, the researchers, asked, through an online survey of directors and superintendents of Aboriginal education and/or Aboriginal education officers/coordinators/leads in all seventy-six district school boards (DSBs) in Ontario, for promising practices in Métis education and for insights on the progress to implementing the 2007 “Framework”. The MNO assisted in the development of the questionnaire, and the Ministry of Education endorsed both the survey tool and research methodology. We also received ethics approval for the survey, site visits, and interviews from Lakehead University, Anuik's former institution, and St. Francis-Xavier University, Kearns' current institution.

Sixty-four (n=64) English language boards and twelve (n=12) French-language boards were sent surveys. Thirty-five (n=35) of these are public school boards, and twenty-nine (n=29) are Catholic. Out of the twelve French-language boards, four are French public and eight French Catholic boards. Six other schools registered with the Ministry of Education were sent surveys, as well. The survey questions asked respondents about self-identification. We wanted to know how many Métis learners are in every school district, and how many learners identify currently as Métis. In addition, questions were aimed at examining current efforts in the boards to encourage self-identification and featuring promising practices (i.e., funding and programs) to achieve greater results in indicators of Métis student success. The survey further explored the creation of AEACs and AEA Circles; the involvement of Métis community members and parental committee involvement; the curricular areas where Métis history, culture, and perspectives are infused, such as the Native Studies course offered at the secondary level; and additional areas that foster awareness of Métis knowledge and history for all learners, teachers, and staff.

## **Interviews**

Key interviews, using semi-structured interview qualitative research methodology (conversations shaped around a set of questions), set in an appreciative inquiry format, captured educators' comments, observations, reflections, and ideas concerning Métis education in Ontario.<sup>8</sup>

Interviews were an important contribution to the analysis. Site visits were conducted at the Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB (KPRDSB), the Durham DSB (DDSB), the Rainy River DSB (RRDSB), the Thunder Bay Catholic DSB (TBCDSB), le Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique des Aurores Boréales (CSDCAB), and the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB (SMCDSB).<sup>9</sup> One telephone interview was conducted with the Lakehead DSB (LDSB). On-site research provided

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<sup>8</sup> Anuik and Kearns interviewed Carolyn Chukra, coordinator responsible for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education in the Lakehead District School Board. Anuik conducted site visits at Thunder Bay, interviewing education leads and coordinators responsible for First Nation, Métis, Inuit education in the Thunder Bay Catholic DSB and le Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales (CSDCAB). Anuik visited the Rainy River DSB (RRDSB) with McLeod, Education Analyst/Officer, MNO. Anuik hosted Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB (SMCDSB) representatives at Lakehead University Orillia campus and, with Kearns, held informal meetings with Mary LeRoy, Aboriginal education coordinator for the Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB (KPRDSB). Anuik and Kearns also participated in an Aboriginal Family night, coordinated by Bill Littlefair, former Aboriginal education officer, and Deanna Frye, Aboriginal education coordinator, both of the DDSB, in December 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Anuik visited St. Theresa's Catholic High School in Midland to participate in the board's inaugural IBM Camp in March 2011, and two board representatives visited Anuik for an in-person interview the following month.

researchers with the opportunity to discuss and even experience some of the outcomes of policies, promising practices, and knowledge exchange.

### **Data analysis**

Findings from a review of the scholarly literature are braided with the insights of respondents to the survey and participants in the interviews. Research identifies gaps in knowledge. Our research also informs the recommendations given at the end of the report.

## **Métis education**

### **Métis education in Canada**

The great diversity of Métis in what is now called Canada is a result of a number of factors, including the rich diversity of First Nations whose cultures play a significant role for Métis communities (Chris Paci, personal communication 2011). The movement of Wendat to Quebec City and the expansion of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee in and around the Great Lakes and south to the U.S. border greatly affected the history of Métis communities in Ontario. The cultural influences of French, English, and other nations, as well as major battles such as the War of 1812, and the backlash directed at Métis in 1869 and 1885, had unique effects on the Métis population in Ontario (Scott Carpenter, personal communications 2011).

While the ethnogenesis of Métis communities in Ontario followed similar patterns to those in the west, there were significant differences. All regions of the Métis homeland are uniquely influenced by climate and natural resources. In the west, the Great Plains dominate, while in Ontario, the influences of the Great Lakes loomed large; geographic regions shaped people, economies, and communities differently. From north-central Ontario to northern Alberta, the boreal forest played a much more significant role in the lives of Métis. In Ontario, there were significant economies in addition to the fur trade, which quickly outpaced it: military, mining, forestry, and fishing. Urbanization and agrarian development played an earlier role in the development of Ontario. Western Canada was, for a critical time in the early formation of the country, influenced by large-scale agrarian settlement. Throughout Ontario, many Métis communities were long eclipsed by generations of settlers; they never disappeared as much as

they became hidden. The pace and timing of settlement had a profound effect on Métis in Ontario.

A major crossroad for Métis in Ontario occurred in 1850. Following an armed defense of Mica Bay, the British governor sent William Benjamin Robinson to negotiate treaties, which became known as the Superior and Huron Treaties (Paci, pers. comm. 2011). Treaties were required because the Crown asserted, in 1763, with the Royal Proclamation, among other things, that Aboriginal title could only be extinguished by the Crown (Carpenter, pers. comm. 2011). Robinson told the assembled Anishinaabe and Métis at Sault Ste Marie that the treaty would only apply to “Indians,” as he had no mandate to negotiate with the Métis (Jennifer St. Germaine, personal communications 2011). Some Métis signed on to treaties while others did not and so the story may have ended there. Subsequent changes to the Indian Act, in particular, provisions related to enfranchisement and the cruel impositions of Indian Agents also contributed to the removal of Métis from reserves (Carpenter, pers. comm. 2011). It would not be until 2003 that the Crown’s uncertainty over Métis rights was settled by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Powley* ruling (see Teillet 2007).

Although a treaty right to education did exist (Carr-Stewart 2001), the only schools available in the mid-nineteenth century were operated by religious orders that set up day and boarding schools whose focus was on developing parishioners, clergy, especially priests, and nuns. After 1867, territorial and provincial governments became established. These newly formed governments took responsibility for education and established legislation and policies reflecting the values of their day. Public schools eventually focused on educating the masses, teaching values so we could be productive citizens (Anderson 1918, Anuik 2010b). In 1883, the federal government, in concert with the Christian churches, began a seventy-five-year policy relationship known as the church-state Indian Residential Schools (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2006, Métis Nation of Alberta 2004, Miller 1996, Milloy 1999).

The University of Regina (*et al.* 2001, 10) provides a succinct depiction of learning opportunities available to Métis prior to 1885 in Saskatchewan:

children who lived within First Nations’ communities were raised and educated in a traditional First Nation manner. Those who lived within the fur trade community were

raised and educated in a Christian and European manner. Schooling was provided in mission schools that were established near trading posts. Often, the male children were sent to mission schools while the female children had a more traditional First Nation education that was passed on by their mother who was often of First Nation descent.

Indian Residential School teachers taught Eurocentric ideals. Their pedagogy stressed mental self-discipline. Teaching compartmentalized religious, not spiritual, emotional, and physical health. These three components, in addition to the mind, are stressed as essential to traditional Indigenous teachings, integral to the holistic health of Aboriginal children. Instruction at Indian Residential Schools was primarily in English, with the exception of French language schools. Subjects taught included math and science, European history, and literature (Miller 1996, Milloy 1999). Denominational and public schools stabilized Euro-Canadian dominance (Stanley 2006). Métis attended all of these schools.

Provincial, territorial and Canadian governments denied responsibility for the education of Métis children in the past, while simultaneously attempting to assimilate all Aboriginal children into the lowest rungs of Canadian society. Education took place in the vacuum created by colonization. For a long time the federal and provincial and territorial governments avoided responsibility for poor instruction and the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in Indian Residential Schools (Anuik 2009, 2010b, Miller 1996, Milloy 1999, *Native American Law Digest* 2006, University of Regina *et al.* 2001). Battiste calls the unequal relationship that existed in the Indian Residential Schools and denominational and public schools cognitive imperialism (2000). Unequal power relationships continue to play out in Canadian schools (Anuik 2009, Battiste 2005), most notably, the assumption that everyone affirms the same value base (Monture-Angus 1995).

Little contemporary attention has been paid to the foundational teachings of Métis lifelong learning, considering that schools and school boards continue to place importance on lessons in English and French literacy, numeracy, and citizenship. Recently, though, efforts have been made to share the foundations of learning as mediated by Métis worldviews. The “Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model,” articulated through work by the Canadian Council of Learning

(2007), was generated through a national discussion facilitated by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (AbLKC), in concert with the MNC and the MNO. The model outlines the relationships of learning within a cultural and ecological context, using the cyclical and natural processes of growth of a tree to illustrate the complex living entities—requiring certain conditions and nutrients for optimal growth and thus ultimate well-being of Métis peoples. The regenerative natural cycle of the tree is compared with the cycles of Métis learning comparing the health of the root system with the forest of Métis learners. Viewing the learning processes in this way focuses on the interconnectedness of all relationships, thereby sustaining and maintaining balance and harmony. (Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre 2009, 20)

The “Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model” is a good basis upon which to engage with the current public educational system and to envision future changes. This model could also help to facilitate educators’ awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the basis for Métis education.

### **Métis education in Ontario**

Before the 1980s, Métis education in Ontario occurred mainly as informal education within Métis families. The Ministry of Education had no dedicated staff working on Métis education. It was not surprising during this period to find school curriculum and textbooks perpetuating myths about Métis. Some of these myths and books continue to surface in Ontario classrooms but to a much lesser extent.

Until 1982, Métis were engaged in membership-based associations that did not have a focus on the formal education system (MNO 2011). Some communities were better organized than others, yet few played a significant role in reforms to the Ontario curriculum. With the formation of the MNO in 1993, a formal citizenship-based government was put in place (MNO 2011). Métis education was a foundational principle of the MNO’s “Statement of Prime Purpose,” and formal education initiatives first took aim at labour market training, leading to meaningful employment (see [www.metisnation.org](http://www.metisnation.org)). After ten years of effectively developing a trained Métis labour force in Ontario, the organization took aim at reforms to improve Métis educational outcomes (St. Germaine, pers. comm. 2011).



In 2005, the government of Ontario released the report “Ontario’s New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs,” which envisioned prosperous and healthy Aboriginal communities (Ontario 2005, 5). In 2006, the Ministry of Education formed the Aboriginal Education Office (AEO) and began the process of engaging Aboriginal communities in educational reform. That same year the MNO Education and Training (MNOET) branch dedicated one person for the sole purpose of working on educational initiatives across the province (St. Germaine, pers. comm. 2011). For the last five years, the AEO and the MNOET have made incredible strides. The AEO has grown to a staff compliment of eight, including a director, managers, analysts, and officers who are responsible for both the K-12 and postsecondary education (PSE) and training aspects. The MNOET branch now includes a full-time manager and two program officers/analysts, whose work bridges both K-12 and PSE. In 2009, MNOET and the Ministry of Education signed an MOU and implemented their first work plan in 2010. The goal of the work plan includes contributions to system wide improvements in Métis education.

Prior to the release of the “Framework” in 2007, Métis education was indistinguishable from mainstream education. Even with the evolution of Native Studies courses and programs since the 1970s, teachers rarely differentiated Métis issues, and there were relatively few resources available on Ontario Métis topics. In the rare case when Métis topics were included, they were as “mostly local initiatives” (SMCDSB interview 2011). In 2003, the RRDSB, in partnership with the Seven Generations Education Institute in Fort Frances, collaborated to fund two positions: an Aboriginal education leader and a vice-principal for Fort Frances High School. The positions addressed “the need for an Aboriginal voice in leadership positions” (Tookenay, interview 2011). The boards established these positions because they observed, for example, “two hundred graduates at Fort High going across the stage, and less than five of those kids would be Aboriginal (*ibid*).” School boards worked primarily in concert with First Nations. Over time, this relationship has evolved beyond transfer agreements and funding to better reflect the diversity of Aboriginal issues for all students. In less than ten years, the focus has moved from addressing administrative gaps, and finding leaders who could nurture and facilitate relationships between Aboriginal communities and local stakeholders in education, to a much more collaborative approach, with special attention paid to Métis.

Shortly before the release of the Ministry's "Framework" in 2007, select school boards did start to form AEACs. Currently, Métis representatives sit on just over half of the AEA councils (n=17) and circles, at boards who responded to the research survey (n=33). We expect that number is lower in those boards, the majority, who did not report back. The justification to talk about the councils and circles is that they contribute directly to school implementation of the ministry's "Framework" and whatever activities might be taking place surrounding Métis education in Ontario. What follows is the story of a few school boards' formation of AEACs and AEA Circles, in line with the recommendations for governance in the "Framework".

In 2004, the RRDSB and the LDSB formed the first AEACs in Ontario, based on the work of a small, internal body "struck for the board to get feedback in what they should be doing for Aboriginal education" (Carolyn Chukra, interview 2011). One of the first tasks for the board was to hire an Aboriginal education coordinator. The coordinator developed a work plan, prepared for her job interview, and now works closely with community colleagues sitting on the AEAC (*ibid.*). The TBCDSB followed suit in 2006. It first established "a student success lead ... at the time, a big part of the student success lead position was working with the literacy and resource teacher to develop strategies to support our Aboriginal students" (Dave Bragnalo, interview 2011) but with the release of the "Framework", the position became Aboriginal education lead. The above illustrations outline that the "Framework" came at a time when a few school boards were already developing formal institutional capacity around First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education.

Another example can be drawn from the experience of the SMCDSB. For the board, the "Framework" promoted "1) excellence and accountability; 2) equity and respect for diversity; 3) inclusiveness, cooperation, and shared responsibility; [and] 4) respect for constitutional and treaty rights" (interview 2011). The board focus was the three priorities outlined by the ministry: a high level of student achievement, reduction of gaps in student achievement, and an achievement of high levels of public confidence. With this in mind, the boards also wanted to find out what the priorities of community members were to improve the school-home relationship, understanding clearly what the educational goals are for Métis families and their children.

In 2009, the SMCDSB “carried out a community consultation with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit stakeholders to help guide our board and to also respond to local needs to the best of our ability” (interview 2011). The board carried out “one-on-one interviews,” facilitated “large and small community gatherings ... focus group presentations,” conducted “home visits,” and held “a community feast” (McGregor 2009, 3). Consultations informed *Community Members Speak: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education K-12*, a report released in 2009 to the Ministry of Education to serve as the board’s first progress report on the “Framework”. The next progress report is due in 2013. The board reported on “a multi-year plan ... [prioritizing] work” through “ten emerging themes acting as a blueprint: governance, school board systems, attitudes, resources, student self-perception, policy, learning environment, curriculum, culture, and supports” (*ibid.*). The thread sewing all board initiatives together, as in other Catholic Boards, is the “need to [always] be able to find a balance between being Catholic and being Aboriginal in a blended/respectful way ... [balancing] ... who we are with Catholicism and [a] positive approach to diversity within spirituality” (*ibid.*, 57).

The SMCDSB says, in reference to its “Making Good Tracks” report, that it has “[a]n Elders’ Advisory Council” with a mandate “to guide and advise” (n.d.[a], para. 3), allowing the board to work with communities “in a way that was culturally appropriate.” Although the council is “still very much in its growing and formation stage,” it has contributed to the vision for “a long-term plan,” while also providing “on-going direction” to the SMCDSB (interview 2011).

The Elders’ Advisory Council was one of three bodies advising the SMCDSB on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educational initiatives. The council and an internal working group guided and advised the consultation process informing the “Making Good Tracks” (n.d.[b]) report (Linda McGregor, personal communication 2012). The AEA Circle formed in 2007 as “a coterminous initiative with the ... Simcoe County District School Board, meeting quarterly with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit stakeholders in our school districts,” including representatives from Indigenous organizations in Simcoe County. The AEA Circle is shared by two school boards so that it is “an efficient use of [community members’] time.” The SMCDSB also has an internal working group that works closely with the circle (McGregor 2009, 4, 59). The internal working group provides

“insight on existing educational needs and programs,” sharing “what is working well and what can be improved for Aboriginal students.” The Elders’ Advisory Council members “guide and advise the project from an Aboriginal perspective with a focus on culture, Aboriginal identity, local history and language” (*ibid.*).

One initiative that several boards have undertaken is the refinement of voluntary self-identification policies, as recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007, 2007b). The ministry “reports on the data” gathered by participating boards in voluntary self-identification forms every three years—with Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead, released in 2009 (*ibid.* 2009, 10; McGregor, pers comm 2012). In the interim, it is up to individual boards to develop self-identification policies, forms, and supporting fact sheets that define clearly the purpose of the policy, who it applies to, and how “it would implement the ministry initiative with the funds provided” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). Most provincial school boards consulted with First Nation, Métis and Inuit community members, groups, and community agencies when developing their policies, forms, and fact sheets. The LDSB and the TBCDSB wanted to get “the community together, so that we were not getting the community back more than once,” to co-facilitate a community session (Chukra, interview 2011).

All boards “have to emphasize ... that the completion of the form is voluntary and, therefore, the form has to conform to human rights legislation ... in accordance with data collection protocols” (*ibid.*). Students do not have to be registered citizens of the federal or provincial Métis Nation to self-identify, though. The LDSB, for example, has “‘Status and Non-status’ in brackets beside the ‘First Nation’ category” (*ibid.*). Several boards, such as the DDSB, ask only if one has Aboriginal ancestry. The choice in Durham was to consciously acknowledge the complicated legacy of colonialism and the sometimes painful issues around who has and does not have official state-sanctioned “Aboriginal” status or “Métis” citizenship. Initial discussions with the SMCDSB and Métis representatives concerned developing a questionnaire. “At one time, ‘Native ancestry’ was commonly used to self-identify and without intending, had the potential to restrict participation ... of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, based on government definitions” (McGregor 2009, 58; McGregor, pers comm 2012). The SMCDSB spent the better part of 2008 and 2009 writing and revising policies to reflect the wishes of community members

for more inclusive and accurate terms, obtaining “feedback and direction in regards to the implementation of a Voluntary Self-Identification policy” (Schmidt, in McGregor 2009, p. 2, SMCDSB, interview 2011). Many boards launched their policies in the fall of 2009, advising families to ask questions and to learn more about self-identification through both the board and online. Forms are shared with students when they register and during student-parent and teacher meetings during the school year. In addition, many boards promote self-identification through school newsletters, encouraging parents and legal guardians to contact the school board office for more information.

In 2007, the LDSB, the CSDCAB, and the TBCDSB launched their self-identification policies and questionnaires. The CSDCAB called its policy “Auto-identification volontaire et confidentielle des élèves autochtones,” and “registration forms were modified to include the self-identification of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations” (Vivianne Mccullough, interview 2011). Dave Bragnalo, Aboriginal education lead, TBCDSB, notes that “the boards west of here ... Fort Frances and Kenora ... were ahead of us by a year so we adopted a lot of their strategies.” According to Bragnalo, there was “a person of Aboriginal descent, a Métis, I think,” involved in the development of the forms for the TBCDSB, “and I worked with him on developing the policy that was adapted from those boards west of our board ... we vetted it through all of the community agencies” at “a big meeting,” working closely with the LDSB. Bragnalo described the meeting with “Métis representatives, a lot of Métis representatives among the advisors who worked on the self-identification policy,” including “a Métis Senator ... he comes to our meetings as a representative of the Métis Nation, and there is always good input” (interview 2011). In 2008, the DDSB began working on its initiatives with several Métis teachers (at least five), Métis senators, elders, community members, families, and students (Kearns, personal experience 2008).

Although a framework was set out by the ministry in a document entitled “Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students,” also released in 2007, boards did exchange ideas, templates, and samples, reviewing existing self-identification policies as part of their efforts to craft forms that reflected community priorities and still conformed to provincial requirements. The TBCDSB borrowed policy and forms from the RRDSB when it developed its

voluntary self-identification protocol. The RRDSB drew from the self-identification form devised by the LDSB, but also “went out to the communities and consulted and met with the leadership, education counsellors, and parents” (Tookenay, interview 2011).

The LDSB has the following option on its self-identification form: “I do not wish to participate” (Chukra, interview 2011). The board added this option because forms were being returned blank. The board has yet to research why families decline to self-identify. Another board was concerned that the inclusion of a “wish not to participate” question option could imply wrongdoing on the part of the families who choose not to self-identify. It argues instead that it needs to concentrate on building welcoming spaces for all First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners, regardless of whether their families complete the self-identification form or not (SMCDSB, interview 2011).

From the Métis community perspective, board discussions are an opportunity to ensure that the language on self-identification policies and forms is accurate and reflects both citizenship and self-identification, a motivation shared by the school boards. The RRDSB, for example, “went through that process for a few months ... it took a good year, year-and-a-half, to get it developed to the point where everyone was comfortable ... all the stakeholders were comfortable with it” (Tookenay, interview 2011). Trust-building was required on both sides. However, communities continue to be largely volunteer based and so they suffer under-development in that they often lack the institutional resources to accompany engagement with boards (Paci, pers. comm. 2011). While boards are hiring staff, the Métis community does not have resources to do likewise. However, there is no one single approach that will work in all circumstances. Positively, though, with increasing capacity building at the MNO, community councils have begun to gain resources and supports to engage more effectively with schools and school boards in their respective communities (St. Germaine, pers. comm. 2011). By contributing to the development of supplementary resources and support for the appointment of Métis to education advisory councils, the MNO is helping to change the education system in Ontario.

Community-based approaches, according to the SMCDSB, enable “stakeholders to bring their issues and concerns forward in a safe and meaningful way.... [C]ommunity members were clear about a preference for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, and that has been incorporated on the

registration form.” Sharing sample policies and forms led “[o]ne Elder ... when he looked at some of the pamphlets that the other boards had ... looking at the definition of Métis” to conclude “that many of them were not adequate, and some were offensive” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). It was dialogues such as the above one on the definition of Métis that enable community members to make decisions on policies and forms for voluntary self-identification, and the SMCDSB facilitates the process, based on the wishes of community members, “lead[ing] the project from behind” (*ibid.*).

A key characteristic of Métis education in Ontario is that the boards now engage the community in a number of formal and informal ways. In Thunder Bay, for example, Carolyn Chukra, Aboriginal education coordinator for the LDSB, goes “to community events,” where “parents are present and ask about the self-identification policy, we discuss it, and they begin to feel more comfortable with the concept” (interview 2011). In the DDSB, both the Aboriginal Education Officer and Coordinator, Bill Littlefair<sup>10</sup> and Deanna Fry, are actively involved in attending Métis celebrations and events with the Oshawa and Durham Region Métis Council (ODRMC).

Moreover, school boards are investing in the process through, as already stated, the hiring of extra staff to facilitate Aboriginal education and the “Framework”, of which the self-identification process is integral. For example, in the RRDSB’s catchment area, the board sent self-identification forms home with students in the middle of the school year, “asking parents to self-identify their children, and the forms would come back, we actually employed a secretary to work from 4-8 pm to do follow-up calls.... Now it is a big part of the registration process” (Tookenay, interview 2011). From a Métis perspective, the value of self-identification occurs when “the data is going to help their children, and that is the test that we, as a school board, must pass to secure the trust of parents.... [T]he results come by always promoting the self-identification policy” (Bagnalo, interview 2011, and see McGregor 2009, 27).

The development of self-identification policies is still so new, though, that school boards continue to review and revise forms annually. Now that boards have two to five years of data, though, they “are able to draw on ... data” (Bagnalo, interview, 2011). The data can inform how

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Littlefair retired from the DDSB in June 2011.

to address student needs: “now, if I want to find out how the Métis kids in grade ten are doing, I can go in and see this data. It takes not even thirty seconds to find out how they are doing in grade ten math, for example” (Tookenay, interview 2011). Having robust data that informs decision-making can be used to assess the efficacy of investments: “a few years ago, two people from the Métis Nation of Ontario were looking at doing some sort of alternative education program, adult learning, with students. And when we pulled the data from the board, we found that the Métis kids were doing much better than the non-Aboriginal kids.... [I]t is nice to know. Therefore, there was no need to stick a bunch of money into that type of program” (*ibid.*).

In 2016, the ministry intends to report to the public on Ontario-wide self-identification data, based on the data submitted by participating school boards from voluntary self-identification forms (Ministry of Education 2009). However, even though the “data shows a significant increase in the number of students voluntarily self-identifying” (SMCDSB, interview 2011), voluntary self-identification by families at registration and throughout the school year cannot be the only source of information on student numbers, especially since Métis families may not yet be ready to self-identify on the forms provided at schools. Some school board staff argue that the ministry is “not going to have data that is representative of the actual number of students” (*ibid.*, 10). Therefore, the self-identification implementation is a learning process, and the data from the forms need to be part of a larger body of data on student numbers.

The ministry reported in 2009 that twenty-eight school boards had approved self-identification policies, and forty-one boards were in the process of “consultation and policy development” (10). Implementing the policies will take time: “the first year that we [the CSDCAB] had it [self-identification], we did not see that many people who were checking it off, however ... we also respected the fact that this was voluntary” (McCullough, interview 2011). Low response rates are not limited to any one board. The SMCDSB, the LDSB, and the TBCDSB all reported lower-than-expected self-identification numbers. Chukra observes: “with the Métis population, the numbers are not as strong” as First Nation students (interview 2011). Métis represent currently only 1.4 percent of the self-identified population of students in the LDSB, even though the number of self-identified Métis families with students registered in the board's schools has doubled since the inception of the self-identification policy in 2007. Bragnalo believes “that the



percentage of Aboriginal students” registered in TBCDSB schools “would be closer to 15 percent,” or twelve hundred students, as opposed to the current number, “almost” eleven hundred First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students; 13 percent of the student body as of January 2011 (interview 2011).

Brent Tookenay, the Aboriginal education leader for the RRDSB, notes that “unless a person voluntarily self-identifies, you cannot count the individual.... You cannot count people unless they check off the boxes” (interview 2011). Chukra sees self-identification as a journey for learners and their families: “[s]ome people don’t even know that they are Métis, or the definition, and that comes with awareness and understanding” (interview 2011). Self-identification data begs the following, possibly rhetorical, question: “are parents who self-identify their children the ones who are engaged in the system? And so they are involved in the school, and their kids are doing well” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). However, school boards need to focus on learners whose parents and legal guardians may not self-identify on voluntary self-identification forms.

How robust is data when we, as educators and educational researchers, know that students may not be self-identifying, or we know that parents are, and the students are not, self-identifying? These are complicated matters, and the hope is that by 2016 the numbers continue to improve, as has been the trend. Because this is such a new process, many school boards want to enhance their composite of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students through investigation of additional sources. For example, the SMCDSB has “been downplaying the use of the ministry data,” as only “what they need to do,” because the board does not “want to stand up and say that ... [they] are doing great based only [on] a small number of students” (*ibid.*). The lesson here for all is that good decision-making requires robust data. Educators need to find data from a number of different sources, enabling comparison across data sets to generate as complete a picture of Métis learners and their families as possible.

Census data does “provide a wealth of information pertaining to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit population[s] for each city, town, or rural community.” The 2006 Census data has caught the attention of directors and superintendents who see that there is “a group of students whom they have not served well,” helping educators raise awareness of Métis families who are learners in

their schools. There is a requirement to facilitate achievement of student success, “because the self-identification numbers are not as high as we had hoped them to be” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). After reviewing data from the Census, the SMCDSB has become aware of “a high First Nation and Métis population in one of our schools and [, therefore, has] explored options to have an additional resource person placed in this school.... [W]e applied to the Métis Nation of Ontario Training Initiative for funds to provide training while meeting an important need for our students” (interview 2011).

Table One. SMCDSB: First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Population, 2006 Census Profile<sup>11</sup>

City / Town	Number of SMCDSB Schools	Aboriginal Identity (5-19 years)	Total Aboriginal Population	North American Indian	Métis	Inuit	Multiple Aboriginal Identity
Alliston	2 E <sup>12</sup>	105	325	215	90	0	20
Angus	1 E	65	305	150	140	0	15
Barrie	13 E + 3 S <sup>13</sup>	700	2,660	1,550	1,085	0	55
Beeton	1 E	105	325	215	90	0	20
Borden	1 E	65	305	150	140	0	15
Bracebridge	1 E + 1 S	N/A	240	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bradford	4 E + 1 S	N/A	235	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Brechin	1 E	70	305	235	50	0	20
Collingwood	1 E + 1 S	80	250	205	45	0	0
Elmvale	1 E	70	305	80	210	0	15
Honey Harbour	1 E	35	255	100	155	0	0
Huntsville	1 E	65	335	165	150	15	5
Innisfil	2 E	120	430	240	150	0	40
Midland	2 E + 1 S	395	1,415	285	1,100	0	30
New Lowell	1 E	N/A	155	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orillia	4 E + 1 S	305	1,325	910	335	10	70
Parry Sound	1 E	60	285	165	110	0	10
Penetanguishene	2 E	335	1,290	180	1,085	0	25
Tottenham	2 E + 1 S	105	325	215	90	0	20
Victoria Harbour	1 E	265	995	225	745	0	25
Wasaga Beach	1 E	N/A	120	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>44 E &amp; 9 S</b>	<b>2,945</b>	<b>12,185</b>	<b>5,255</b>	<b>5,770</b>	<b>[25]</b>	<b>385</b>

The LDSB has also extracted census data to support the assertion that the number of Métis families self-identifying at school is much lower than those living in the board's catchment (Chukra, interview 2011). Bragnalo, as well, examined the TBCDSB's self-identification data, along with “numbers from a lot of school boards in the province,” finding that they are not “anywhere close to the census numbers partly because of the short period of time since the

<sup>11</sup> Prepared by Linda McGregor, Manager, First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Initiatives.

<sup>12</sup> “E” stands for elementary school.

<sup>13</sup> “S” stands for secondary school.

initiative has come out; the school boards need more time” (interview 2011). Extrapolation of numbers from census data enables school boards to examine their own self-identification numbers against this additional data to forecast enrolment in its schools and raise awareness, develop services, and coordinate professional development.

Professional development is an important space for boards to implement “Framework” goals and seek support from the ministry. Professional development sessions are comfortable spaces and afterward “several teachers ... identified as Métis ... [and] they want to promote their culture and identity” (SMCDSB, interview 2011, also noted by the DDSB and in interview with the LDSB). A new initiative of the SMCDSB concerns “First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Champion Teacher PD [Professional Development]... [T]his involved one teacher from each elementary and secondary school within ... [the] board, a total of fifty-three schools (forty-four elementary and nine secondary). This will help to establish a school contact and FNMI Champion at the local level and it was well received” (interview 2011). The Champion Teacher professional development has expanded with these teachers to focus on the “process of looking at literature ... with a critical eye” (*ibid.*). The LDSB has “special assignment teachers [SAT], one in each high school” who are “key contacts ... who make things happen in Aboriginal education at their respective high schools.” Within the board, the Aboriginal education resource teacher supports “the SAT roles and in turn the SAT roles provide support to our Aboriginal students and staff within that school” (Chukra, interview 2011).

The lesson from the boards is to have teachers who are internal allies and are able to “plant ... the seed within their schools and watch ... it grow,” and this requires that teachers are selected “who are in alignment with ... [the] professional development that you are delivering so that it is going to build on what was recently provided to the teacher” (*ibid.* and see Alberta, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Services Branch 2007). Tookenay agrees, saying that “it cannot only be Indigenous people teaching Indigenous content. It has to be all teachers feeling confident to teach it”; non-Indigenous teachers “are taking the time to research and form relationships and bring Elders into their classrooms” (interview 2011).

Collaboration is another key characteristic of Métis education in Ontario. Through collaborative knowledge exchange schools are becoming more aware of the need for students to receive practical and hands-on learning experiences. The SMCDSB understands that “[t]he more real world connections that can be made during classroom applications, the more engaged and informed students will be.” During March break in 2011, the board held its first-ever IBM Camp, a week-long session with “culture, First Nation and Métis role models, hands-on technology, awareness about careers in technology, science, and health, as well as a community showcase component” (interview 2011).

Since the “Framework”’s release, the initiatives to support Métis learners in small, school-based programs, where several promising practices have germinated, have emerged to become part of province-wide strategies to support Métis education. Many school boards are now working in concert with Métis communities to support student success and academic achievement, bringing Métis awareness to all learners, while also fostering a passion for educators to become lifelong learners. The ministry is providing measures for success and opportunities for inclusive Métis education. Operational planning is left to each school board, some of whom are now working closely with their respective AEACs and AEA Circles to devise initiatives to facilitate Métis student achievement and self-identification. School boards with AEACs or AEA Circles say they are invaluable for helping to “set priorities and work toward the development of a multi-year plan” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). For Métis education to actually work, and educational initiatives specifically connected to Métis learners to be understood as promising practices, communities must be involved in addressing “policy and curriculum issues” (Tookenay, interview 2011). School boards cannot work in isolation in forming visions and proposing policies for educational initiatives--their staff must include the ministry and the Métis community. School board staff members need to share their promising practices with each other and throughout the province. For the SMCDSB, the focus for Métis education “is to socialize education rather than racialize education. It is important to learn ‘side by side’ as opposed to presenting content from a ‘them and us’ mindset” (McGregor 2009, 8, SMCDSB, interview 2011). Therefore, Métis education is for all Ontarians.

Challenges exist, most notably the need to find sustainable resources to support Métis education. Furthermore, continually raising awareness of the Métis as one of the three Aboriginal peoples of Canada, recognized in the 1982 Constitution, is only a start. Being able to “socialize education” to the realities of the plurality of the diversity of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples is a much harder task. In her first three years as Aboriginal education advisor, Chukra (interview 2011) notes “that the focus” of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit initiatives in the LDSB “was heavily based on First Nations,” especially the board’s cultural resources guide (see also McGregor 2009). Such a focus requires her, in concert with the board’s AEAC and staff, to bring Métis perspectives in (Chukra, interview 2011). The need for more curricular resources and an expanded conception of the diversity of Métis people was a concern echoed by the educators who contributed to our study across Ontario. Therefore, the report now turns specifically to share key findings, which are presented in two major sections: quantitative and qualitative data. This is followed by a section on promising practices.

## **Key findings**

### **Quantitative data**

Thirty-three out of seventy-six school boards replied to the survey. Twenty-eight out of sixty-four surveys were returned from English-language school boards, fourteen out of thirty-five public school boards and fourteen out of twenty-nine Catholic school boards. Five out of twelve French-language school boards replied to the survey, two out of four public and three out of eight Catholic. Researchers also sent six surveys to schools listed as “alternative and other” by the ministry (i.e., hospitals), but none returned the survey. Given the distinctive mandates, including care, of these “other” schools that do not function like the larger school boards (as they are individual schools), we did not include the decision of these schools to decline to participate in the study in the final total of school board surveys.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> School boards that did return surveys were the Algoma DSB, the Algonquin & Lakeshore DSB, the Avon Maitland DSB, the Catholic DSB of Eastern Ontario, le Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l’est Ontarien, the CSDCAB, le Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l’Ontario, le Conseil scolaire Viamonde, DSB of Ontario North East, Durham Catholic DSB, DDSB, Grand Erie DSB, Halton Catholic DSB, Halton DSB, Huron-Superior Catholic DSB, James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board, KPRDSB, Limestone DSB, London Catholic DSB, Moose Factory Island DSB, Niagara Catholic DSB, Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB, Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic DSB, Rainbow DSB (RDSB), RRDSB, Simcoe County DSB, SMCDSD,

### Self-identification data

Thirty-two of the thirty-three respondent school boards confirmed they have self-identification policies. Twenty-six boards have collected data on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners through self-identification forms. Six boards are in the process of implementing self-identification policies and forms. Finally, one school board declined to develop a self-identification policy.

Table Two: Self-identification data (April 30, 2011)

School Board	Métis Students	Aboriginal Students
Algoma District School Board (DSB)	298	1252
Algonquin & Lakeshore DSB	68	232
Avon Maitland DSB	11	63
Catholic DSB of Eastern Ontario	25	90
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien	In-progress	In-progress
Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales	7	17
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien	In-progress	In-progress
Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	0	10
Conseil scolaire Viamonde	4	5
DSB Ontario North East	42	701
Durham Catholic DSB	61	159
Durham DSB	96	353
Grand Erie DSB	25	501
Halton Catholic DSB	In-progress	In-progress
Halton DSB	In-progress	In-progress
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	184	503
James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board	N/A <sup>15</sup>	N/A
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB	76	503
Limestone DSB	59	405
London Catholic District School Board	3	23
Moose Factory Island DSB	0	0
Niagara Catholic DSB	In-progress	In-progress
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB	89	420
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic DSB	6	43
Rainbow DSB	209	8 percent
Rainy River DSB	204	965
Simcoe County DSB	374	1102
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB	133	274
Sudbury Catholic DSB	N/A	384
Superior North Catholic DSB	6	171
Trillium Lakelands DSB	36	107
Waterloo Catholic DSB	In-progress	In-progress
Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB	7	22

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Sudbury Catholic DSB, Superior North Catholic DSB, Trillium Lakelands DSB, Waterloo Catholic DSB, and Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB.

<sup>15</sup> The James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board does not have a self-identification policy nor does it plan to develop and pass one anytime soon.

<b>Total</b> <sup>16</sup>	<b>+2,023</b>	<b>+8,305</b>
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Statistics Canada, the Ministry of Education, and the MNO report that there are at least twenty-six thousand Métis students attending schools in Ontario. However, prior to gathering self-identification data, the majority of school boards were not aware of the number of Métis students in their respective schools. Schools gathering self-identification data for more than one year indicate that the number of families who identify their children as Métis continues to grow in each consecutive year the self-identification policy is administered. One board indicates that it is beginning to include the self-identification form with kindergarten and school registration forms to further identify and support First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners' achievement and self-identification.

### **Staff and support**

We wanted to know the roles various individuals in school boards played in advancing the “Framework”. Respondents were asked if their respective boards had education officers and/or coordinators (n=17) and/or lead teachers (n=19) responsible for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learning. Boards were not asked if these officers or coordinators worked specifically on Métis education but broadly on Indigenous education. Boards who had both of the above positions were surprisingly rare (n=12), superintendents/lead teachers/vice-principals and coordinators, with around 30 percent of boards reporting such arrangements. Similarly, in terms of support, researchers were interested in learning about community connections. 67 percent of boards that responded to the survey reported having an AEAC or AEA Circle (n=22). This is an encouraging level of engagement in English school boards, as the French boards were not included in the calculation since these boards did not report on these questions. Only 52 percent of all the boards that responded had a Métis representative (n=17) who is involved with some aspect of school governance. What is particularly surprising is that there are over thirty-five community councils and so it is reasonable to have expected a higher level of engagement. More research would be required to understand the issues regarding Métis participation rates and real/perceived barriers in terms of the participation of Métis, particularly from the local councils.

<sup>16</sup> Note that “+” indicates over 2,023 and over 8,305 students because the RDSB reports that 8 percent of the student population identify as Aboriginal. We do not have the number of students who represent this 8 percent, being disaggregated by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit status.

Table Three: Staff and Support

<b>Participating School Boards<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>O</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>AC</b>	<b>MR</b>
Algoma DSB	X	X	X	X
Algonquin & Lakeshore DSB		X	X	X
Avon Maitland DSB		X	X	X
Catholic DSB of Eastern Ontario	X	X	X	
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien				
Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales				
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien				
Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario				
Conseil scolaire Viamonde				
DSB Ontario North East	X			
Durham Catholic DSB			X	
Durham DSB	X	X	X	X
Grand Erie DSB	X	X		
Halton Catholic DSB	X	X	X	X
Halton DSB	X	X	X	X
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	X	X	X	X
James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board		X		
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB		X	X	
Limestone DSB	X		X	X
London Catholic DSB	X	X	X	X
Moose Factory Island DSB				
Niagara Catholic DSB	X		X	X
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB		X	X	
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland & Clarington Catholic DSB		X	X	X
Rainbow DSB		X	X	
Rainy River DSB	X		X	X
Simcoe County DSB	X	X	X	X
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB	X	X	X	X
Sudbury Catholic DSB		X	X	X
Superior North Catholic DSB	X		X	X
Trillium Lakelands DSB	X	X	X	X
Waterloo Catholic DSB	X	X	X	
Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB	X	-	-	-

In response to our question on recruitment and retention of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit staff, only two school boards out of thirty-three say that specific hiring policies are in place to encourage recruitment and retention of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit staff members: the Moose Factory Island DSB and the RRDSB. One board reported that it would like to encourage Francophone First Nation, Métis, and Inuit applicants for their available positions (CSDCAB).

<sup>17</sup> Key: ( X ) indicates “yes,” so, for example, “yes, there is a representative.”  
 ( ) an empty box indicates that there is no representation at this time.  
 ( - ) indicates no response.  
 O = Aboriginal education officer or coordinator.  
 T = Aboriginal education lead teacher.  
 AC = AEAC or AEA Circle.  
 MR = Métis representatives on the AEAC or AEA Circle.



Two boards indicate that there are general anti-discrimination hiring policies: the James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board and le Conseil scolaire Viamonde. One board indicates that its hiring policy is under review: the SMCDSB. The TBCDSB actively recruits First Nation, Métis, and Inuit graduates from Lakehead University's teacher education programs. Finally, the Toronto DSB (TDSB) is looking at ways to create a pool of candidates with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit heritage who could then apply for positions in the board when they become available.

### Curriculum at the secondary level

We asked school boards how many secondary schools they have (n=269), and we learned that about half of these schools were currently offering Native Studies courses (n=139). We did not ask about Métis content in the Native Studies courses nor did we ask about Métis content in other courses, such as history, etc. There continues to be a void in understanding exactly what is being taught about Métis in Ontario's classrooms, and future research needs to focus on this question in a real and meaningful way.

Table Four: Native Studies

All Participating School Boards	Secondary Schools	Native Studies Course Offered
Algoma DSB	11	9
Algonquin & Lakeshore DSB	5	2
Avon Maitland DSB	9	9
Catholic DSB of Eastern Ontario	10	6
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien	8	0
Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales	1	0
Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien	10	0
Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	8	0
Conseil scolaire Viamonde	10	0
DSB Ontario North East	10	4
Durham Catholic DSB	7	1
Durham DSB	22	15
Grand Erie DSB	16	8
Halton Catholic DSB	8	4
Halton DSB	15	6
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	3	2
James Bay Lowlands Secondary School Board	1	1
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB	16	9
Limestone DSB	11	5
London Catholic DSB	8	0
Moose Factory Island DSB	0	N/A
Niagara Catholic DSB	8	2
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB	1	1
Peterborough Victoria Northumberland & Clarington Catholic DSB	6	4

Rainbow DSB	9	9
Rainy River DSB	3	3
Simcoe County DSB	17	12
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB	9	5
Sudbury Catholic DSB	5	3
Superior North Catholic DSB	0	N/A
Trillium Lakelands DSB	7	7
Waterloo Catholic DSB	6	2
Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB	9	0

The quantitative data collected must be given some additional context. This is the start of the implementation of the “Framework”, which includes the development of school board-level self-identification policies to enumerate Métis learners registered in Ontario’s schools; to form AEACs and AEA Circles; and to encourage parental and community involvement on the above committees at the school board level to ensure that “parents ... participate more activity and directly in the education of their children” (Ontario 2007, 20). Some boards have been faster than others to implement these measures, either having hired or moved staff into dedicated roles to “develop and implement programs and services that are supportive and reflective of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and languages” (*ibid.*, 19).

The final two questions from the survey concern promising practices connected to challenges and opportunities at the school board level. We did expand on the questions during site visits and oral interviews. There, school board staff members did share stories on the implementation of the “Framework”, narratives identifying opportunities and challenges.

### **Qualitative Data**

Participants who did agree to our request to respond to the electronic survey and/or be interviewed are directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers at the school board level. The stories they share provide substantive responses to the final two questions of our survey, asking for stories evaluating the effectiveness of promising practices as connected to challenges and opportunities at the board level.

### **Self-Identification: Opportunities and Challenges**

Some school boards have hired Aboriginal education officers, coordinators, and lead teachers to facilitate the development and implementation of self-identification policies and supports. One

survey respondent (the Aboriginal education lead at the KPRDSB) describes how her board has developed and implemented its self-identification policy, which “began in 2007 with the creation of pamphlets and forms. We have since held 3 gatherings in the 3 areas of our board to share information about the self id policy and the FNMI framework, and ... bring together Aboriginal community members to build a sense of community in the board.” Many boards maintain web sites where their self-identification policies and practices, explaining First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education and the benefits of self-identification, appear. The exercise is valuable, as directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers gather, in concert with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, historical information on the Indigenous history of the board's region. The information is then delivered as fact sheets accompanying the self-identification forms, and it is often stored on the boards' web sites. Families may see their own history reflected in self-identification policies, enabling school boards to encourage students, as well as their parents, caregivers, and guardians, to voluntarily self-identify as having Métis ancestry.

To identify as Métis, one needs to self-identify only, and/or recognize one's Aboriginal ancestry, and does not need to be a citizen of the Métis Nation. The challenge with identity politics and the creation of categories is that people are not always aware or simply cannot identify as one culture or another, checking only one box on a form. Often students have complex ancestries and multiple identifications and community memberships. This is particularly true when it comes to being Métis. Historical forces have shaped Métis identities and those forces have to be taken into account when asking students to self-identify and afterward when using this data to design programs and supports that are culturally relevant.

Many school boards find that it is sometimes a challenge to know who Métis students are. Some respondents encounter families reticent to identify until after they receive official Métis citizenship from the MNO. Tookenay explains: “some families are in the process of attaining Métis status through local Métis associations. The process is fairly lengthy, and I think some families are not self-identifying until they have their official ... status,” understood as Métis Nation citizenship (interview 2011). Boards are trying to make a concerted effort to convince students who have Métis ancestry to self-identify, recognizing the complicated history around

status and loss of status issues. Brenda Collins, Aboriginal education project manager of the London District Catholic School Board, knows, after meeting with several Métis families, that “families believed that they needed ‘official’ papers to prove that they are Métis and we cannot officially approach them about this until they have self-identified ... a conundrum.” Kathy Dokis-Ranney, Aboriginal education coordinator of the Rainbow District School Board (RDSB), maintains that “there is still confusion about ‘who is Métis’ or how one determines if they are Métis.”

Several school boards recognize that people have questions and potentially have different and multiple identities with regard to their cultures, heritages, and ancestries. One respondent from the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB) writes: “locally, there is much confusion around what it means to be Métis. The majority of people of mixed First Nation and European ancestry ... identify as First Nation. The actual numbers of students who come from the specific Métis traditions rooted in the West is very low.” The misperception that Métis are only from the west is a real barrier to Métis education in Ontario. Shawn McDonald, special assignment teacher--Aboriginal education, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, says: “there seems to be confusion over the identification of Métis learners. Specifically, does the designation include anyone of mixed ancestry or is it more formally those who trace their descent to mixed European and First Nations descent. As well, while it is suggested that the Métis people developed their own culture and spirituality, the particular details of these distinctions remain unclear.” Dokis-Ranney goes on to say: “I know some people think they are Métis when one parent is Native and one is non-Native and no one has status--so they identify as Métis sometimes.” As noted above by the GEDSB, and implicitly by several survey respondents and interview participants, there is a larger confusion as to the historical and contemporary experiences of Métis in Ontario's schools.

School board staff must be patient, understanding the toxic legacy of colonialism manifested in systemic and blatant expressions of racism throughout Ontario. Families and learners may want to still distance themselves from self-identifying to avoid encounters with racism. For example, the SMCDSB hears that families face racism outside school: “[s]pecifically, the Métis in Penetanguishene, we heard from a lot of people that if you were a businessperson, you did not

promote yourself as being Métis because it would have hurt your business” (interview 2011). The Government of Alberta's Aboriginal Services Branch concurs: “in order to avoid racism and stereotyping, some Aboriginal children make a concerted effort to hide their Aboriginal identity, claiming to be French, Italian—anything but Aboriginal” (2005, 1).

Littlefair, former Aboriginal education officer for the DDSB, maintains that “due to years of assimilation policies, families prefer not to participate or are no longer aware of their own ancestry (kept hidden from offspring).” A survival strategy before the 1980s in Canada was not to talk about being Métis outside the family and, in those instances where severe impacts of colonialism were felt, to deny any link, even among family members (Anuik 2009, Richardson 2006). Lack of awareness is a challenge to gathering data on Métis learners because “at times the ‘unknown’ fraction exceeds both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal fractions” (ACCC 2005, 49).

Directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers do report that the number of self-identified students is far below the actual number of students of Métis ancestry in their schools. Educators have posited a number of reasons to explain the discrepancy. Most commonly, we heard that forms are new, and more awareness is needed to educate students, parents, guardians, and caregivers to understand the benefits of self-identification. However, most of the boards who responded to the survey and our requests for interviews do note that the total numbers of students reporting Métis ancestry is increasing in successive consecutive years.

Nevertheless, “there are still a lot of barriers because a lot of parents and the grandparents of our students right now still went through the negative experiences of the public system, not only residential schools, but the public system in general, and I think there are still barriers there” (Tookenay, interview 2011). Littlefair suggests that “families may be hesitant about participating in the program due to a historical distrust with institutions ... ‘why do you want this information and what will you do with it?’” Tookenay adds that “some people ask why we need to be counted again?” (interview 2011).

The K-12 school boards' experiences are similar to the experiences of universities and colleges-- both sectors of the education system report low student self-identification of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit ancestry. The Association of Canadian Community Colleges reports, on its survey of community colleges' supports to facilitate learners' self-identification and success, "respondent institutions indicated that the main reasons students do not self-identify include a mistrust of the institution's motives, fear that the information will be used in a negative way, that it is no one's business or that they do not want special treatment" (ACCC 2005, 48). Fear and mistrust have emerged as common barriers in several boards. An Aboriginal education lead survey respondent, Shelley Mierle, from the Trillium Lakelands DSB (TLDSB), notes that discrepancies between census data and self-identification data indicate that "parents do not see a specific reason related to their child's needs and/or they do not trust how the data will be used."

### **Métis Community-School Connections: Opportunities and Challenges**

We find that relationships between Métis and schools are foundational to building awareness, understanding, and appreciation; they result in pedagogical and curricular innovations at the school board level. This is particularly true when directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers understand their interactions with community members to be founded on the principles of respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity (Kirkness & Barnhardt 1991). In response to a question asking her to identify the promising practices of the LDSB, Chukra notes that the

first thing that comes to my mind is relationships, relationships with everyone, from the staff to the students to the community. They are crucial... It is all part of that relationship building, and I think that is the first practice that comes to mind because if you don't have that relationship, then how can you achieve what it is that is going to support the students? And relationships ... [are] interconnected to everything, even when I think about my role and having relationships with key contacts in certain schools, and I call them my allies. And they create allies within their own schools, getting more people on board. That is why I say that relationships are important (interview 2011).

Board relationships depend on involvement with community members, integrity and awareness, and appreciation and understanding of Métis histories and contemporary experiences in Ontario's schools. There are formal and informal relationships with many boards. Formally, seventeen boards have established active and ongoing relationships with local Métis councils and

have a Métis representative on their respective AEACs or AEA Circles, stay in touch with the MNO, and seek out Métis resource people to participate at schools within and outside of classes.

Some boards would like to develop local connections, but their staff members say that their access to a council is challenged by distance. Additionally, boards observe that Métis councils in their respective areas are just forming and not yet able to actively be involved in academic and extracurricular school activities. When asked if it has worked with a local Métis council or Métis Senators, the Aboriginal education lead and ESL coordinator for the Avon Maitland DSB, Coralee Mathews, responds: “we do not have access to a council—the closest council that we are aware of is geographically distant.” The board reports having a Métis representative on its advisory council but having a person there does not always translate into having Métis community educators in classes. The board falls between the Grand River and Credit River Métis Councils, as well as the Great Lakes and Georgian Bay Métis Councils. For the board to cultivate an active engagement of educators, there would need to be space for travel within its operating budget. The GEDSB faces the same challenge: “incorporating a Métis organization in board planning has been a challenge as the closest Métis Council is the Hamilton-Wentworth branch.”

Vivianne Mccullough, directrice des services à l'élève of the CSDCAB, says, to her knowledge: “there is not a Francophone Métis community in Thunder Bay.” She goes on to say that “in terms of understanding and the component of the French culture, the Indigenous culture, and the Métis culture ... [it] would definitely be an asset” to have Francophone Métis in the schools “because we could look at our French programs and see where gaps exist, so we could expand further.” Mccullough, like several directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers, wants to see more Métis involvement, formally, as teachers, and informally, as advisors on school boards and associated committees and visitors to classes and school events (interview 2011).

The community councils do not have dedicated staff to attend all school board and AEAC and AEA Circle functions, and this is a particularly acute issue when it comes to both Michif and Francophone communities. Practical barriers of distance and language, as well as human

resources, impede the full participation of the Métis community and improvements in Métis education in Ontario. Growing awareness of the reality of volunteer-based community councils has inspired a spirit of collaboration at some boards. For example, the Francophone Catholic school boards seek out contributions from Francophone Métis currently working with boards in southern Ontario. Community engagement results from establishing relationships, and all respondents to our survey and participants in interviews agree, from relationship building comes opportunities for community engagement and infusion of Métis knowledge in curricula.

### **Promising Practices to Support Métis Learners**

This section is a summary of stories that survey respondents and participants in interviews identify as promoting Métis education in Ontario. It is told through the stories that participants in interviews with us share and in select survey respondents' substantive responses to our questions on promising practices in Métis student achievement. It is our hope that schools and school boards may be inspired to try some of the practices that participants share. It has come through clearly that school boards emphasize relationships with local Métis councils, helping to establish a welcoming environment for learners and their families. Collaboration between schools and Métis result in prominent displays of Métis signs and symbols on school grounds, such as the flag of the Métis nation. Holders of Métis knowledge come to classes to share knowledge, teachings, and perspectives. The aforementioned actions dovetail with the "Framework"'s goals, to see meaningful involvement from Métis schools, as members of advisory committees and instructors in class, overseeing curricular enhancements and special projects tied to the sharing of Métis knowledge. And the presence of Métis builds a welcoming atmosphere at school, where learners feel confident to self-identify.

It is clear that school boards whose staff members are attentive to the regional history of Métis are able to bring rich promising practices and curricular deliverables to teacher team meetings. There, teachers consult with each other and share ideas and resources. Participants identify several promising practices connected to knowledge exchange among Ontario's teachers. Notable ones include the TDSB's "Do's and Don'ts in Aboriginal Education" resource and the SMCDSB's development of the "First Nation, Métis, and Inuit champion teacher kit", with Indigenous educator Jan Beaver, and the "We Are all Related" book making project. The



aforementioned resources and practices shine as exemplary deliverables from engagement with community members and collegial meetings among teachers throughout the province. There is now a book that may be included in Canadian history classrooms, by Beaver: *The 10 Most Significant Crossroads in Aboriginal History* (2009). However, the ministry needs to create a mechanism to share lesson and unit plans, professional development ideas, resources, and so on among boards and teachers so that all teachers, especially those in predominantly rural areas, have regular access to resources as they are generated, not only during in-person and face-to-face professional development sessions.

There are varying degrees of Métis awareness and engagement in Ontario's schools. In Simcoe County, "every school in the county has a Métis Sash and flag" (Simcoe County DSB). TLDSB is one of several boards that have "installed in all schools ... Welcome [signs] in Michif languages and other languages." Michif in Ontario, however, has yet to be documented and so the Michif resources in schools come primarily from western Canadian provinces, especially Saskatchewan. For many schools and school boards, "ensur[ing] ... that community and culture is reflected back to Aboriginal students through the presence of Aboriginal art and artifacts" is an essential part of Métis educational practices (Alberta, Aboriginal Services Branch 2005, 68). Students who see themselves reflected in school buildings, pedagogy, and curricula are more likely to self-identify, succeed academically, and achieve personally and holistically. Schools with Métis-focused curricula, Métis Senators and Elders involved in class and on advisory committees, safe spaces, and the Métis Nation flag visible have the potential to raise learners' self-esteem, nourishing their whole being (*ibid.*, Cajete 2000). Awareness of the Métis context of one's school fosters mutual respect among students, staff, and families, elements of good citizenship within the province of Ontario and the nation of Canada. Therefore, it is necessary to tease out the regional variations of Métis languages to ensure the curricular and pedagogical practices of teachers and school boards connect intimately with the Métis heritage where the board is.

Promising practices tied to documentation of regional Métis heritage is starting in Ontario's school boards. Several boards regularly invite Métis artists, academics, historians, authors, and Senators, Elders, and resource people to their schools. For example, the Superior North Catholic

DSB (SNCDDB) has, with financial support from the Ministry of Education, been able to hire Scott Carpenter, Métis, “to present his collection of Métis artifacts at all of our nine schools. Each class of students in Grades 4-8 will develop and publish a resource book through the blurb.com website. From these four exemplary books will be chosen and printed for all schools, to provide some Métis resources.” The DDSB<sup>18</sup> attributes its long list of Métis initiatives to ongoing dialogue and partnership with local/regional Métis Councils:

in Durham, we are fortunate to work with a very proactive local council. We appreciate the opportunities to attend and participate in a number of activities and events that involve the ODRMC, e.g., Métis Heritage Celebration, Métis Potluck, Cannington Dog Sled Races. There is strong Métis representation and voice on the board's Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle (A Métis Senator, Métis Women's Representative, and several full-time Métis teachers and a Métis youth sit on the AEA Circle). This year [2010 to 2011], the ODRMC received substantial funds from the Department of Heritage Canada to provide opportunities for the greater community to share many aspects of the Métis culture through the building of the voyageur canoe by Métis Elder Marcel Labelle, learning Métis dance with Trina Lavallee, and Métis fiddling with J.J. Lavallee. Hundreds of students benefited from these experience[s]. One Métis student was able to work towards a secondary school co-op credit as an apprentice. Working with Métis Elders and presenters to arrange presentations and programs to teachers and students (e.g. Joseph Paquette, David Bouchard, Marcel Labelle, Christian Pilon, Two Métis Sisters: Cecile Wagar and Claire Kearns). (DDSB, survey response 2011)

Many boards continue to develop a dynamic model of learning, teaching, and sharing through formal and informal partnerships with members from communities in the school

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<sup>18</sup> Littlefair shares a number of the DDSB's Métis-focused initiatives,

- *Aboriginal Family Night*—ten evenings and five Saturday excursions—Métis mentors participate in activities (elementary and secondary).
- *Canoe Teachings*—DDSB [with the initiative of] ... the Oshawa-Durham Métis Council-brought together Métis Elder, Marcel Labelle, to build a voyageur canoe; [the Oshawa Métis council submitted a grant to the (federal) Ministry of Heritage for the project, and as a result provided a space to build the canoe and] the program provided co-op credit opportunity to two Aboriginal students, and several French Immersion and English classes at the elementary and secondary levels were able to visit the construction site and learn alongside a revered Métis knowledge holder.
- *Métis presentations*—e.g., Métis Voyageur Christian Pilon has visited several schools to share his voyageur experiences. Elder Joseph Paquette presents to teachers during PA [Professional Advancement] Days (elementary and secondary). Dr. Laura-Lee Kearns presented at the Aboriginal Education Symposium, and so on.
- *Métis jigging lessons*—series of ten lessons provided to selected schools in elementary and secondary schools with a final presentation to the school and community highlighting Métis culture and jigging (elementary and secondary).
- *Fiddling presentations*—Métis fiddler presented at several schools (elementary and secondary).
- *First Nation Literacy Partnership Project (FNLPP)*—presentations by Métis author David Bouchard—several of David's books are also used in the project (elementary).
  - *Walking a Good Trail*—awareness of Métis culture is brought into the Outdoor and Environmental Education Program (elementary and secondary).

board's region, inspiring pride in Métis learners and informing the larger school community of the rich Métis heritage in Ontario. Consequently, there is a need to share lessons and curricula with all learners. Tookenay agrees, in that part of “doing well” ensures that all learners, including Métis, access “programs [that] are available to all students, even if it is money gained through Aboriginal programming.... I have been honest with the ministry, saying that this money is ‘for all students’ because that is the way it is supposed to be. It is working!” (interview 2011).

David Bouchard, a Métis author, has been instrumental to leadership in initiatives that involve Métis-focused learning for all students. Similarly, Bouchard's contributions positively influence curricula while also effecting improvement in learners' performance on conventional indicators of academic success, such as English literacy skills. He has delivered a keynote speech on his love of reading to fifteen groups of elementary and secondary school students, teachers and staff, and directors, superintendents, and vice-principals and principals in the GEDSB and has spoken to parents and students at evening sessions at schools with large First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student populations in the Waterloo Catholic DSB. He has served as a role model for the RRDSB, and several board representatives have indicated that his books have been purchased, are being used in the classroom, and are available in their school libraries.

Several school board directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers indicate that their teachers assign books by Métis authors in class. Similarly, teachers form and participate in professional working groups to develop promising practices for inclusion of Métis-focused curricula in classes. Tookenay says, “we [the RRDSB] bought the book *Seven Sacred Teachings* [2009] for every kid in our board because it is part of our character education. The issue with it, though, is if teachers do not have a little bit of knowledge on the Seven Teachings, it sits on the shelf, or they look at the pictures and play the DVD [accompanying the book] once in a while” (interview 2011). To help teachers transform their practices and feel comfortable with the perspectives and content, Tookenay “put this teacher group together—they are developing lesson plans to share with all of the teachers so that [they] ... may adapt the

lesson plans with their own or use the lesson plans identically to the ones developed in the working group” (*ibid.*). The success that Bouchard currently experiences with the uptake of his books by school boards is likely to encourage more Métis to write and tell their stories and the MNO, through their Moccasin Camps, to encourage all community members to share their knowledge through publications that can then be used in Ontario’s classrooms, hopefully, at all grade levels.

Two school boards have initiatives to facilitate knowledge exchange among teachers. Currently, Native Studies teachers representing eleven regional school boards in the Barrie region gather “to share resources, talk about strategies, and assess how they are doing.... All of these activities are made possible with ministry funding as part of this initiative” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). The RRDSB has its “Native Language Professional Learning Community and have had this community before the Ministry of Education had given money to support it. The Seven Generations Education Institute facilitates the ... community” and it “has provided resources for the Native Language Teachers in the board.... [I]t is official ... they meet once a month.” And the board invites the local Catholic school board’s “Native language teachers into our professional learning communities” (Tookenay, interview 2011).

Organizing field trips to Métis places offers numerous ways for all students to learn about the cultural and political history and contemporary knowledge of Métis. Old Fort William in Thunder Bay is mentioned by three participants as being a rich storehouse of Métis heritage for students and teachers to access. For directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers, the above space, and other places, offers time for reflection and sharing with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students on education. Tookenay refers to a recent conference of Indigenous students that he attended to illustrate his point on the need to include all learners in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educational initiatives:

we held a Student Voice meeting at Old Fort William and ... brought kids from all over the NOEL [Northern Ontario Education Leaders] boards: the eight northwest Ontario school boards. One of the most revealing things that they [the students] said when we asked them what was working, what more was needed, etc. ... was that if they got the chance to have a meeting again, they wanted their non-Aboriginal friends to attend. These were all Native kids—Métis and Native—who wanted their non-Aboriginal friends to be a part of this too.... We have to listen to what our students are saying.... We cannot be ... segregating Aboriginal kids ... That is ... not where we want to go. (interview 2011, and see Aboriginal Education

Advisory Council in McGregor 2009, 12, 23, and see Ontario, Ministry of Education 2009, 19)

Old Fort William has been the site for learners to become aware and make meaning of the Métis past in northwest Ontario and to discuss their own priorities for learning, education, training, careers, and work. In 2010, the TBCDSB and the RRDSB “were involved in a regional student leadership conference ... and we had leadership and cultural activities at Fort William”

(Bragنالo, interview 2011). That same year, in the fall, the CSDCAB

gathered all of the grade five and six students from our board, because it touches the [Native Studies] curriculum in these grades specifically ... and ... pulled them into the Old Fort [William] for two days. They lived like the voyageurs and the First Nations ... Afterward the principal who organized it had the students write entries that reflected on what they had learned about it: the Inuit, the Métis, the Ojibwa.... [S]he gathered the entries together, and we have a booklet that we have created with the children's comments about how different children's lives were when living in the past. (Mccullough, interview 2011)

Mccullough goes on to say that the children “really appreciated the spiritual component” of the trip. The outcome of the excursion, the booklet, is evidence to sustain the lesson that “learning is defined more by life experiences.” As she read the booklet, Mccullough found herself wishing “that I had learned what they had, considering that I grew up in Long Lac” (*ibid.*).

The Métis past may be accessed at the Fort. Reflecting on the CSDCAB's students' two day trip to Old Fort William, Mccullough appreciates the opportunity for learners to connect to a Métis place informed by Métis perspectives:

it is one thing to read about it but it is another thing to live and experience it with people who are sharing the oral stories of the people ... students love that, they really, really enjoyed the experience. I think that we will continue to do that every two years so that the students in grades five and six have the opportunity to experience it. I think that it will have a lasting impression ... [on] understanding a part of the Métis past.... [I]t is part of the appreciation of the way life was and is today and by living like someone else, you return to the classroom with a much deeper understanding. (interview 2011, and see Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle in McGregor 2009, 10, 23 and Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre in McGregor 2009, 38)

Similarly, Ann Magiskan, a former Native heritage resource officer at the Fort William

Historical Park, and now Aboriginal outreach coordinator of the TCDSB, says there is a wealth of history on the Métis in northwest Ontario there, some of it gathered by her (interview 2011).

Participants have demonstrated that there are indeed valuable resources in communities and throughout the province of Ontario and individuals who can work in the classroom; facilitate cooperative work placements; and lead cultural awareness training for directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff.

Tookenay recommends that superintendents and vice-principals and principals take the lead in gatherings in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit places that facilitate sharing between school boards and community leaders:

as a board, a couple of years ago, we gathered a number of Elders and translators ... at the historical centre—the Manitoulin Mounds—and the principals and program support team joined the Elders and translators in a meeting. We sat in a circle, and there was no agenda, people posed questions, and the Elders, for example, answered them.... You could see the tenseness in the principals, who were not sure what we were doing, and could not get their cell phones to work. After about ten minutes, everyone was relaxed. I [started by saying]: ... ‘if the leadership in our schools cannot commit to attending this session to get a better understanding of their Aboriginal partners then how can we expect teachers to do that in their respective classrooms?’... [T]hat is the philosophy that we have taken. (interview 2011)

Exercises such as the above one can be facilitated by directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers. Similarly, such gatherings can also facilitate familial self-identification, which is a consistent goal tethered to the “Framework” and desired by the MNO.

Relationships are the touchstone to community-school connections, negotiating physical and cognitive distance that is collapsing slowly. Relationships have the potential to result in enhancements to curricula at the board level, resulting in teacher practices that pay attention to place, especially Métis places and spaces, historical and contemporary. However, the quality of relations between Métis and school boards varies. It is imperative to school boards to find ways to include Métis in their classes and activities, as community members’ contributions can help schools reflect Métis heritage within their spaces, helping to address one important goal in the “Framework”, being to build environments where families feel comfortable to self-identify as Métis. Documentation of Métis knowledge in diverse media promises to push the knowledge exchange past the board level, affecting the larger provincial community of educators. All learners and teachers benefit from revised and enhanced curricula, pedagogy, and infrastructure

reflecting the Métis heritage of Ontario. Finally, relationships nourishing community and school connections are ongoing, requiring continual care and attention from school board staff members.

School boards that are providing resources to facilitate professional development for teachers and staff are experiencing success in implementing many aspects of the “Framework”. Spaces for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education are beginning to include Métis, and many schools have engaged renowned Métis educators, who are visiting regularly. Several promising practices have emerged to address pedagogical, curricular, and staffing needs, supported by the foundational principles of success for all students and the importance of awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Métis knowledge, history, learners, families, and communities in Ontario's schools. However, this story of promising practices contains recognition of shortcomings in existing school systems that impair Métis education.

### **Challenges and Needs to Support Métis Learners**

The purpose of this section is to highlight the main findings from research on pedagogical and curricular challenges and needs to support Métis education. Challenges exist with the creation of safe spaces for Métis learners and their families. Challenges also reside in the province of pedagogy and curriculum, namely problematic or absent representations of Métis. Further challenges concern staffing. Directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers reflect here on the identification of the problems, and strategies to address them.

### **Engagement of Métis Learners, Families, and Communities**

The Ministry of Education's 2009 survey of schools' implementation of the “Framework” calls for “[i]ncreased participation of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents in the education of their children” (15). However, as Chukra says, schools need to “[m]ake parents aware of cultural supports available at school or within [the] community” (interview 2011, and see Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle in McGregor 2009, 18). Similarly, it has already been documented above that the legacy of racism in Ontario public and Catholic schools and the federal government-church-operated Indian Residential Schools continues to result in suspicions of

schools, held by parents and legal guardians. To encourage parental participation and, hopefully, parental self-identification of their children is the shared responsibility of school boards, schools, community agencies, and Métis Elders, Senators, and resource people. It needs to be noted that suspicion may lead to the perception held by vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff of parental disengagement from schools. However, the directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers do understand that survival may interfere with parents' participation in schools. And "student success can be in jeopardy if the family does not have appropriate childcare or experiences financial challenges" or the family is headed by only one parent and thus there is a "need to have supports in place" (Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle in McGregor 2009, 18, Ann Magiskan, interview 2011).

School boards need to promote their schools as welcoming spaces for Métis families and places where they want to send their children and youth, "but there must be a certain comfort level that needs to be felt by parents and students going into a building" (Tookenay, interview 2011). McCullough thinks "that in terms of our future enrollment ... we are going to have to look at our advertising campaigns to see whether we could find more students.... [If] there are more and more people discovering their Métis background.... [If] one of the two parents ... is Métis, then it is likely a Francophone school will be chosen for their children's education" (interview 2011). Directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff need to be patient as they build a safe and welcoming atmosphere in their schools for Métis families and communities. Tookenay remembers that "[i]t took years of working with ... [families] and doing different things to know that there is someone they can count on, and there is a voice for them" (interview 2011). Similarly, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff need to have "patience and understanding about challenges that native students face," encouraging students "to stay in school despite attendance problems that may be a result of addictions, drug abuse, family problems, etc.," and teachers need to "get at the root of the problem" (Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre in McGregor 2009, 40, 45). All the while, parents and extended families are seen as assets to students' success and to the classroom, continually encouraged to visit and participate in school life in the hope that their children and youth stay focused on their studies.



Parental engagement is likely to be a long-term area of focus for schools and school boards, and Métis Senators and Elders cannot always come into schools. Consequently, there is a need for curriculum for teachers to use and feel comfortable using in class. “[T]he teachers should be able to deliver that information and have some sort of knowledge base” (Tookenay, interview 2011). Similarly, the teachers need to comprehend the legacy of colonization on the contemporary lives of Métis in Canada and Ontario and, therefore, need to be able to help learners by understanding their assets as Indigenous peoples to the school and the challenges they face. The infusion of Métis knowledge and perspectives, and the building of supports to help Métis learners, must begin in schools, with directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff, and the aforementioned stakeholders must be proactive, not waiting for Métis community members to come forward to participate in schools.

### **Pedagogical and Curricular**

Certainly, many teachers’ practices have been affected by inaccurate and misleading depictions of Métis in existing curriculum and a lack of Indigenous voices in their own education. There is still a lot of confusion about the Métis in Ontario. Current pedagogical practices and curriculum aggravates this problem. Similarly, systemic problems hinder long-term growth and transformation of pedagogy and curriculum. Finally, opportunities do emerge to address the above challenges, and respondents to our survey and participants in interviews share lessons gained from their practices.

For example, teachers’ practices and use of curricular resources concerning Louis Riel and the 1885 Northwest Resistance pose unique challenges. Survey respondent Mathews argues:

teaching of the story of Louis Riel in Ontario schools has changed little since the 1960s. In the majority of schools his conviction and execution is used as an opportunity for students to compose persuasive essays arguing for or against him as a traitor to Canada. Children with little background on Métis culture or heritage and even less understanding of the many Aboriginal contributions to Canada’s unique character as a diverse, safe and peaceful nation are presented with possible reasons why Riel may or may not be a villain and then asked to take a side and argue it: the message inferred being that there is no right or wrong way to view this topic. The presentation of Riel as a topic for debate of this kind does little to educate students about the contributions of Métis of the West to the development of Canada as a whole or the advancements of democratic rights for all Canadians that came about as a result of the Western Métis. I believe it helps to perpetuate an anti-Western, anti-French attitude still prevalent in Ontario and fosters a sense of indifference towards multiculturalism and

Aboriginal peoples in general. For most educators, perspectives on Riel are largely influenced by what they learned in school themselves and what is found in textbooks and resources for teaching intermediate history. This is a province-wide issue that no single school board can resolve effectively itself. To solve the problem we need access to both professional development that will enlighten and enrich teachers['] knowledge of the Métis and better resources that not only bring current historical perspectives on Riel to classrooms, but also up to date information on the Métis heritage of Canada and its role in giving us a unique and successful place on the world stage. (survey response 2011)

Mainstream historians writing the history of Canada often neglect mention of the Métis as an Indigenous people in Canada, recognized by the 1982 Constitution as one of the nation's three Aboriginal peoples (Hodgson-Smith 2005). D. Bruce Sealey and Antoine S. Lussier observe that students of Métis history see the Métis and Riel in 1885 and then witness their subsequent demise in the pages of Canadian history (1975). Métis scholars Leah Dorion and Darren Préfontaine argue that "the great man of history theory still applies to Métis history and Métis studies. For instance, popular historians continue to work on projects that concentrate exclusively on Louis Riel rather than having a more thorough analysis of the Prairie Métis people's historic grievances" (1999, 4). Consequently, contemporary educators and Métis have to raise awareness and understanding to foster appreciation of the complexities and diversities of Métis in Canada and Ontario. Mathews suggests that "the Métis seek partnerships with scholars ... to advocate for and develop the kind of resources that will provide us all with a fresh vision of our country and its history" (*ibid.*).

The path taken in Alberta is to integrate "Métis history courses into programs so that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students have a better understanding of Canadian history, which begins with Aboriginal history, including treaty rights, Aboriginal rights, and Métis" (Aboriginal Services Branch 2005, 69). This approach is also being followed by many boards, according to Chukra, "we have Native Studies and Native languages, and yes, the information is starting to go in our civics classes.... It is starting to ripple out to the other subjects, whether they are mandatory subjects or not, so Indigenous perspectives are being infused not only in electives at the secondary level but across the curriculum at the secondary and elementary levels. Teachers are starting to naturally do it, not all teachers but some. However, there is definitely a need for improvement" (interview 2011). Although there are no dedicated courses at the elementary level in Native Studies, school board directors, superintendents, managers, and Aboriginal education

leads and officers are working with teachers and helping them to infuse their curriculum, as one Catholic school board superintendent reports:

in our work with teachers and students we have been providing awareness of all Aboriginal groups. We use resources that include Métis traditions and beliefs and have included Métis presenters in our training sessions. We have four projects currently being funded by the Ministry. One is the development of our board website and data collection. The second is our high school leadership initiatives. The next project looks at promoting awareness and knowledge to our classroom teachers. We have targeted grade 3, 6 and 7 elementary teachers. We are working with high school teachers who teach subjects that contain aboriginal expectations. (history, religion, law, etc.)

It was interesting to learn that boards had difficulty incorporating Métis stories and perspectives at all grade levels. However, some boards are experiencing success with some strategies, for example, Mathews reported: “teachers from grade k-8 have had the opportunity to participate in symposiums featuring Métis teachers/speakers: this year our symposium focused on 7th Generation Stewardship and our keynote speaker was our Métis Elder; this helped teachers to form new understandings of Métis perspectives on our environment/spirituality and make plans to take this learning to their students ... through our character education work, we provided schools with the Métis picture book: *The giving tree [ : A retelling of a traditional Métis story (2009)]* as a mentor text for teachers to share teachings on responsibility in the month of January.” Mathews goes on to say that “the grade 6-8 curriculum calls for information about Métis participation in the development of the Canadian federation and the foundations of our culture/society. Further Métis--Canadian history should be addressed in Canada and World Studies at the grade 10 level. Currently, resources for this often do not relate to Ontario Métis and teachers struggle to find up to date resources to help connect Aboriginal Canada's story to course materials.”

There are indeed system-wide challenges as much as there is promise and opportunity. One of the major challenges that currently exists is that there are only short-term opportunities to enhance pedagogy and curriculum. Littlefair notes: “some of the initiatives are short term (one year or less) and are not sustainable without funding. Ongoing dialogue with stakeholders such as the ODRMC regarding funding opportunities through a variety of sources is very important.” In order for teachers to be able to include Métis students in class, they need to also have the knowledge base, the supports, the resources, and the education behind them to be able to deliver

what it is they need to deliver to understand and connect to students. The general knowledge teachers have about Métis is beyond the scope of the current program of research upon which this report is based, and remains an outstanding issue that requires further research.

There are several ways for educators to be more critically aware of Métis education and begin to change teaching practices to include Métis respectfully, in a good way. Teachers can:

- Consider how Métis history is being presented
- Incorporate strategies to detect bias, working with learners to tease out racist themes in contemporary and historical writing about Métis
- Question the silence surrounding Métis identities in existing literary and scholarly work, as well as curriculum
- Consider whether multiple representations of a variety of Métis people can be shown and discussed
- Question whether Métis people are portrayed as a contemporary living people or as historical figures, detecting literary and scholarly work where both concepts present themselves
- Create opportunities to hear, learn, and interact with Métis people
- Infuse Métis knowledge throughout the curriculum, as opposed to treating it as an add-on (Battiste and Henderson 2008)
- Distinguish Métis families and communities from multicultural education, paying attention to history, treaties, and the legacy of colonialism throughout
- Consider whose perspectives are included and excluded from the telling of historical events
- Consult with the MNO for further direction and guidance.

### **Staffing**

The Ontario Ministry of Education reports a “significant increase in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff in school boards” (2009, 9). However, the percentage of Métis teachers and staff in proportion to the number of Métis students registered in provincial school boards remains a challenge, as Tookenay identifies:

slightly under 40 percent of the students in our board are of First Nations ancestry, but does our staff represent this number of students?... Part of it is in the board's hiring practices. Things have to be changed and they have to reflect the needs of the community. Currently,

teachers are hired based on their marks and extracurricular activities from university.... It could be possible to try a local candidate in the position because if the local candidate is not hired, then the individual is forced to leave. And, therefore, we have less Aboriginal teachers to draw upon. You have to instead want what is best for the board, to have the best teachers, and Aboriginal teachers need to be math and physical education teachers.... I would like to see an increase of at least 15-20 percent of the teaching staff in this board [as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit] because as our enrolments [are] ... declining, our Aboriginal population is increasing so pretty soon the majority [of students] will be Aboriginal, the minority non-Aboriginal. (interview 2011)

School boards are aware of the need to build a representative staff, but have to revise their hiring policies and practices to meet this need. Similarly, directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and Aboriginal education leads and officers need to work with all staff to increase their knowledge of the “Framework”, and the foundations and practices associated with Métis education.

In 1986, Sydney Davis asked: “to what extent will the quality of education be improved through efforts to increase native participation” in the school system as teachers and staff? Are “higher test scores, a lower drop-out rate and culturally sensitive curricula for Indian and Métis students” likely to be the result? Davis goes on to respond to the question, saying that “Indian and Métis teachers have not been employed in sufficient numbers long enough to answer this question” (35). And the question cannot yet be answered since Ontario’s school boards have not conducted voluntary self-identification surveys of their staff, even though it is likely that there is still a “lack of Aboriginal people in the teaching profession” in the province (Tookenay, interview 2011). Therefore, it is not possible to investigate the effect of Métis teachers on Métis student achievement in school.

In the LDSB, developing policies and programs to support the recruitment and retention of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit staff has been identified by the board’s AEAC “as a priority to look at.” However, the “school board has not done ... [its] own staff self-identification process” but “when we started our cultural awareness session,” the first part of professional development for all principals, teachers, and staff in the board, “I had a couple of teachers come up afterwards” who realized “after going over the terminology of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ... that they actually had Aboriginal ancestry” (Chukra, interview 2011). Therefore, the LDSB is aware of

some of its Indigenous staff and so is the TBCDSB: “we do have some Métis staff ... [one is a] principal” (Bagnalo, interview 2011).

School boards need to question candidates, in competitions for teaching and staff positions, about the Indigenous families who reside in the area because these interviewees need to know the local area to be effective as teachers and staff. Tookenay recalls one competition in the RRDSB for the vice-principal of Fort Frances High School. A candidate for the position was asked “no questions ... about Aboriginal students or communities.... I went to talk to the superintendents in human resources, who were responsible for the questions, and informed them that there were no questions asked about the Aboriginal students and communities. I let them know that it was surprising, considering that 50 percent of the student body at the school is Aboriginal, that there were no questions about Aboriginal students and programs in some type of context.” Such questions are necessary because “a lot of the families that a vice-principal spends time on are the Aboriginal families.... And knowing how to relate to [Aboriginal families] ... is really important” (interview 2011).

Only two school boards have identified practices to recruit First, Nation, Métis, and Inuit teachers and staff. Although the RDSB does not have a formal hiring procedure in place, an interview can be “more sensitive to how the interview goes in terms of ... eye contact or [a] quieter voice, or longer thinking times, etc. [that] ... may occur—so where others might see this as a weakness or deficit ... it [may be understood] as part of who they are as an Aboriginal person.” Similar accommodations exist in the RRDSB. “The last [Ojibwe] language teacher that I helped to recruit ... the interview process for the position is an example of a promising practice. The person conducting the interview asked three of the questions in Ojibwe and asked for me to be there because I am able to understand the language.... For the first few questions, the candidate was shy and withdrawn and could not really expand on her answers. The next three were in Ojibwe, and you should have seen the confidence and expression” (Tookenay, interview 2011). It remains to be seen if practices such as the aforementioned ones may prove effective in the recruitment and retention of Métis teachers and staff in Ontario's schools. However, it is recommended that school boards seriously consider attempts to try and evaluate such practices and, if successful, develop policies surrounding hiring practices.

Therefore, the push to revise and enhance hiring policies to employ and represent Métis as teachers, staff, liaison officers, social workers, and directors, superintendents, and vice-principals and principals contains many prongs. School boards need to begin a self-identification process to find out how many Métis teachers they have on staff. At the same time, school boards need to have a welcoming atmosphere to support staff self-identification. School boards must also revise hiring practices to encourage local candidates to apply, and part of this task involves developing questions that test candidates' awareness of the Métis families in the school board's area. Once schools are aware of who their Métis staff are, they can start to measure their effectiveness on Métis students' achievement and consider more deliberate attempts to recruit and retain Métis staff.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

### *Key Findings*

The summary of key findings has been divided into promising practices and challenges. A challenge is any activity or policy that is developing or needs to be passed to help bring about transformation and changes in education involving Métis learners. Challenges are addressed when educators concentrate on the achievement and self-identification of Métis children and youth, making spaces to foster the awareness of Indigenous peoples/knowledge/history that the "Framework" strives to help bring about. Promising practices are still new but seem to be exhibiting beneficial pedagogical and practical results in schools. The key findings from the data collected have been enumerated throughout the report. Whenever possible, we shared the voices of the directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff. We framed the data within a larger narrative of hope for change, building inclusive educational environments that honour Métis learners and their respective knowledge systems, worldviews, and epistemologies.

### *Promising Practices*

Several promising practices emerge from our research, which address pedagogical, curricular, and staffing needs. All are supported by the ministry's foundational principles of success for all students. Each addresses the importance of awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Métis

knowledge, history, learners, families, and communities in Ontario's schools. The following practices emerge from the data that we have collected.

- School boards with Aboriginal education leads, such as Aboriginal education officers, coordinators, vice-principals, and/or teachers do much better than those without
- Consistent and authentic Métis community representation, formally on AEACs or AEA Circles and informally through parental involvement and teacher engagement, increases Métis awareness and self-identification
- School boards that provide dedicated resources to facilitate professional development for teachers and staff are experiencing success in implementing many aspects of the “Framework”
- School boards that engage key Métis community educators to teach Métis knowledge, history, and culture aimed at students, staff, teachers, vice-principals and principals, superintendents, and directors are creating positive teaching and learning opportunities for all.

### *Challenges*

There is a lack of awareness in many schools and within school boards of Métis history and culture. Several school boards indicate that initiatives to raise awareness among staff are only in their earliest phases, and they have asked for more assistance from the Ministry of Education to support their programs, practices, and curriculum enhancements. School board participants share the following instructive recommendations.

- Supplementary and curricular resources that speak to Métis experiences and are based on Métis perspectives still need to be developed. These tools need to aim to broaden the appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the place of Métis people in the historical and contemporary life of Canada. A lack of resources hinders the implementation of promising practices, pedagogically as well as collaboratively (enhanced relationships between Métis councils/communities and schools and school boards)
- Some boards feel as though they do not have regular access to Métis councils, community members, teachers, Senators/Elders/Old Ones, and knowledge holders. Therefore, connections need to be forged with councils and Métis knowledge holders and resource people
- Some boards have not embraced the 2007 policy mandate and have yet to provide professional development concerning Métis issues



- Projects are limited by the number of key people, sometimes volunteers, and the application of special one-time grants. Often boards are stressed for staff who can garner community and institutional support, function at all levels of project management, and communicate results to a wider audience. Some boards are fortunate to have Aboriginal education staff or allies who can infuse the curriculum with Indigenous perspectives, and/or can successfully work with Métis community leaders to enrich the curricular experiences for students and educators. Similarly, some school boards have grant writers and/or staff able to write first-rate applications for funding, but not all do.

All in all, there is still much to be storied, shared, and learned about Métis history and contemporary culture, practices, and people. This is especially true for boards that do not have real or possible regular access to Métis councils, community members, teachers, Elders, Senators, Old Ones, knowledge holders, and resource people. For directors, superintendents, vice-principals, principals, teachers, and staff in boards that have not yet embraced the “Framework”, professional development around First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learning issues, historical and contemporary, would be a good first step. A number of promising practices are emerging, including successful collaborations between Métis councils and boards and educational outreach by Elders, Senators, resource people, and traditional knowledge holders, as well as Métis educators. The challenge remains, in many cases, that projects are contingent upon several key people, sometimes volunteering, to apply for grants, garner support, coordinate the implementation of projects, and oversee project completion. While the educational return is great, projects are short term and contingent upon funding. They take a lot of work on top of educators’ already busy schedules. The same challenge arises with inviting dynamic community educators into classrooms, funding is contingent and short term. Boards that have grant writers and directors, superintendents, coordinators, managers, and education leads and officers responsible for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educational initiatives are the ones who can successfully work with Métis leaders to develop practices to facilitate academic and personal achievement for learners and promote self-identification while enriching pedagogical and curricular foundations and practices.

However, too often boards do not receive adequate funding to conduct programs connected to the “Framework”. Representatives of the SMCDSB and the RRDSB have noted that funding envelopes are getting thinner as more school boards are accessing Ministry of Education funding to support the “Framework”. For the 2010 to 2011 school year, “we ... applied for a lot of projects ... and got only one of them. We put in over one hundred thousand dollars [in grant applications for] ... funding and received sixty-five hundred.” And this funding was from the Ministry of Education and “strictly for FNMI.” And, “anytime you want to start new programs, you may have to cut something to do something else” and, therefore, “there is a need for directed funding,” justifying the requirement for ongoing, consistent funding from the ministry targeted for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit initiatives in school boards (Bragنالo, interview 2011).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a general consensus among participants in our research that relationships are foundational to ensuring cooperation and collaboration.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, that leadership and resources will be of crucial importance. Such practices bode well for system-wide improvements that are likely to result in improved Métis education in Ontario. These conclusions are drawn from published literature, a survey of all school boards, interviews with staff in a small number of school boards, and published and unpublished documents prepared by school boards.

There is no single initiative that ensures and, similarly, could prevent the inclusion of Métis education in Ontario's schools. The research indicates, in all of the challenges and promising

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<sup>19</sup> There are major areas that require further research. The following is a list of potential research questions:

- What are the in-class practices of teachers and how are they connected to the *Framework*? To pursue this question requires researchers to be present in the schools, working closely with teachers to construct, in the long term, a model classroom and/or spaces where promising practices may be shared, specifically those relevant to Métis education
- How do secondary school vice-principals, principals, and teachers decide on the schools where the Native Studies courses are offered? How does the Native Studies curriculum and how do teachers of the subject include Métis in their own philosophies, curricula, and practices?
- How can we, as researchers and practitioners, identify opportunities for infusion and support the infusion of Métis knowledge, culture, and appreciation across the curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels?
- Why do certain school boards choose not to draft and implement a self-identification policy to identify and support the achievement of Métis learners? Are there alternative practices to facilitate Métis student achievement and self-identification in school?

How may the insights and knowledge from the “Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model,” generated by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, in concert with the Métis National Council, in 2007 (see Canadian Council on Learning 2007, Cappon 2008), be connected to the *Framework*?

practices, that there has to be both trust and willingness on the part of both the formal educational system as well as the Métis community to work collaboratively to ensure inclusion takes place. Moreover, the best initiatives reinforce the foundational principle of relationships and relationship building.

The “Framework” facilitates programs in support of Métis education throughout the province to take shape. The research in this report charts the transformation of Métis education in Ontario's schools to provide models of promising practices that include knowledge exchange between Métis families and communities with school board staff and teachers. This report also documents the transformation of Métis education in Ontario's schools from “mostly local initiatives” to province-wide practices through knowledge exchange between Métis families and communities and directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff (SMCDSB, interview 2011). The ministry must continue to make consistent financial investments to fulfill the goals of the “Framework”, thereby assisting the promising practices in this report to continue to evolve at the school level. There is a continued need for Métis learners to see themselves reflected in school buildings, staff, pedagogy, and curricula if they are to achieve academically and feel comfortable self-identifying (Alberta 2005, Cajete 2000).

School boards are beginning to rely more and more on the self-identification data they are generating to allocate resources to support Métis students. However, board directors and superintendents would be prudent to cross reference the numbers with census data and to consult with community organizations to ensure efficacy of their numbers. Underreporting is likely to continue to be a problem for the next few years, and additional research is needed to determine when self-identification data may be considered reliable, possibly on its own. However, it is likely that the self-identification data is never to be used in isolation from additional sources of data, such as the census returns. Regardless of the total population of Métis in the classroom and student body, though, teachers must still enhance curricula to reflect the history and contemporary presence of the Métis in Ontario. The SMCDSB argues that teachers must always build an atmosphere in class open to self-identification by students, regardless of whether or not the family has already self-identified (interview 2011).

Collaboration is the key to implementation of the “Framework”, and the Ministry of Education and its school boards are working closely with the MNO. Community involvement in Métis education initiatives is the bedrock foundation of Métis education. The school boards that completed our survey and requests for interviews connect intimately with the foundational principles in Indigenous education, being respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity (Kirkness & Barnhardt 1991). There are teachers and students addressing racism and its legacy, investigating bias in resources, reviewing inaccurate, misleading, and offensive materials, and inquiring about and discussing representation of Métis in curricula. However, there is still a lot of confusion about what it means to be Métis and, therefore, promising practices on representation of Métis in curricula and in class. There is thus still much to be storied, shared, and learned about Métis history and contemporary cultures, practices, and peoples, yet school board staff members seem committed to building an atmosphere in class and throughout the school where learners are proud to be Métis, as the understanding of Métis families and communities evolves in Ontario. School boards need to be informed to be strong advocates of Indigenous youth, fostering resilience while learning together with Métis families and communities.

The infusion of Métis knowledge in the curriculum must always account for racism and colonization and their continued expression in Ontario, historically and contemporarily. School boards suggest that a commitment to school and learning fosters resiliency, even if students may experience difficulties at home and in the community. Therefore, teachers need to connect the history of Indigenous education to contemporary challenges facing Métis learners in Canada, addressing confusion surrounding who the Métis are when questions surface in class. It is clear from the research participants that directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff know that Métis educational initiatives—from voluntary self-identification policies to enhancement of curricula to knowledge exchange on promising practices to support the learning of Métis students—is the responsibility of everyone, Métis and non-Métis. Teachers especially need to feel confident to infuse Métis perspectives, particularly local material, and knowledge in their lesson plans. Some school board administrators are facilitating this by organizing gatherings and sharing information between community leaders and teachers and staff. The research shows that there are invaluable community resources throughout the province

of Ontario. There are a number of Métis educators who can work in the classroom, facilitate cooperative work placements, and lead cultural awareness training for directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff.

In terms of infusion of Métis knowledge across the curricula, teachers must be vigilant of opportunities to include Métis content, regardless of the number of self-identified students in class. A real challenge, which may even be considered a barrier, demonstrated in our research, is the lack of financial resources, in particular to bring in Elders, Senators, Old Ones, and resource people to share their expertise with learners, teachers and staff. Similarly, there are currently only short-term opportunities to enhance pedagogy and curriculum, despite school boards, the Ministry of Education, and the MNO being only at the beginning of documentation of Métis knowledge and languages. Language revitalization and storage plans need immediate attention from the ministry and school boards to ensure the information is available for subsequent generations of learners and is packaged for ease of teacher access and use in class. And not all school boards have regular access to Métis councils, community members, teachers, Elders, Old Ones, and knowledge holders. Therefore, building a sizeable bank of Métis resource people—Anglophone and Francophone—is likely to be an ongoing challenge for school boards. And consistent financial investments have to be made in professional development initiatives for teachers, concerning infusion of Métis knowledge across the curriculum. There is a need to identify the precise benefits—especially in conventional measures such as grades—to learners involved in support of Métis student achievement and self-identification. To ensure dedicated space in the boards' operating budgets for staff responsible for Métis education requires administrative and community support, along with a commitment to always document and share promising practices with school boards throughout the province.

School board staff members must be attentive to the communities where they work, understanding the historical narrative of education as it affects familial attitudes toward school as much as the local knowledge of Métis community members. Teachers are likely to find that parental engagement is a long-term area of focus for schools and school boards. Therefore, school staff members must always find opportunities to develop welcoming and inclusive spaces. Teachers must always hold high expectations of Métis learners. Together, all school board staff

members and ministry personnel must work to identify the precise benefits—especially in conventional measures such as grades—to learners involved in support of Métis student achievement and self-identification.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, it takes a wealth of initiatives tethered to the foundational principle of relationships to ensure Métis education in an atmosphere of awareness, understanding, and appreciation. Several school boards are joining Métis learners, educators, and community members in Ontario's schools on their educational canoe voyage. With more awareness and resources to support the Métis, we will be able to navigate and transform curricula to reflect Métis knowledge. Learning about historical and contemporary Métis people enriches the lives of Métis youth and all learners and helps to ensure that the legacy of colonial education and the systemic silence surrounding Métis identities does not continue in the Ontario educational system in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>20</sup> The MNO suggests the need to assess the effectiveness of the *Framework* using a number of metrics, including conventional indicators such as students' grades.

## **Appendix A: Recommendations**

*The Ministry of Education should:*

- Invest, through consistent instructional grants and programs, in professional development and collaborative opportunities, re: Métis initiatives in boards
- Provide school boards with dedicated resources for Métis education
- Gather self-identification data and Métis student achievement data and work with the MNO to ensure the appropriate dissemination of this information to the public
- Increase dedicated staff throughout the ministry who can provide support and leadership on Métis education. Currently, education officers responsible, in full and in part, for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education initiatives fulfill this role, but not all school boards have education officers and/or not all have connections to Métis
- Develop a curriculum review and writing process that infuses Métis knowledge, perspectives, and experiences for all grades and subject matter. At least two school boards are doing infusions through their curriculum, but the practice is not uniform across all school boards in the province
- Develop a database, possibly in the form of a cyber-library of curricula, lesson plans, and promising practices for teachers to use in classrooms that can be accessed by all educators

The Ministry of Education needs to direct all school boards to dedicate staff to Métis education and provide funds in its transfers to boards earmarked for staffing. Boards allocate funds from their operating budgets to ensure that there are assigned staff responsible for relationships with communities, for curriculum supports and professional development. These staff can coordinate a database of curricula, lesson plans, and promising practices for teachers, all the while collaborating with representatives from boards throughout the province. There is a need to develop an accessible electronic database to connect school boards and teachers around the province with Métis educational practices. This could be an initiative that the Ministry of Education coordinates alongside the “Framework”, a project for the MNO, or a joint initiative involving both of the above parties. The above recommendation is starting to be addressed by the school boards profiled in this report. “The EQAO [Education Quality and Accountability Office] web site has an excellent section on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners and invites educators to examine their own biases and to have high expectations of all

students.” The SMCDSB makes “resources accessible to teachers,” linking “the ministry-developed K-12 resources to [the] ... board web site.” Now “there’s a wealth of material, and the ministry continues to build this resource, as well.... It’s about easy access for teachers [and] lists recommended resources, classroom activities, and suggestions in regard to drawing on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit resource people” (SMCDSB, interview 2011). The lesson from the board is that “[b]uilding a bank of local, regional, and national resources is important” (SMCDSB, interview 2011), especially for the SNCDSB, which is “[l]arge in geography,” making “travel costs ... very expensive” and “winter driving ... dangerous.” An electronic database can, therefore, connect schools in rural areas with resources to support infusion of Métis knowledge and perspectives across the curriculum.

- Continue to monitor the implementation of the “Framework” in all boards, publishing these findings.

*The school boards should:*

- Assign funds in their operating budgets to ensure money spent on professional development includes Métis education, so that teachers can infuse Métis knowledge across the curriculum. Teachers need to be provided with the training and resources to infuse Métis history and studies into the curriculum through existing courses while also reviewing existing curricula and practices regularly in a format consistent with the expectations of community members and the Ministry of Education. Directors, superintendents, and vice-principals and principals must lead the infusion of Métis knowledge, perspectives, and content in the curriculum, preferably “from behind,” as the SMCDSB observes (interview 2011). Students need to develop critical analytical skills in class to evaluate accuracy, recognizing misleading and stereotypical information contained in some resources. Teachers and learners need to search together for accurate resources on the Métis Nation, especially when addressing questions that learners raise in class. As the SMCDSB says, “There’s an assumption that we all know our history, culture, etc.—in some cases that’s true but for the most part we received the same, basic information or misinformation that mainstream schools received” (interview 2011). All learners and their teachers, Métis and non-Métis, need to engage with Métis worldviews, epistemologies, content, and perspectives.



- Coordinate lead staff in boards to ensure professional development opportunities for all educators to implement the 2007 “Framework”

There is always a need to commit financial and human resources to professional development because such opportunities facilitate knowledge exchange on promising practices and nourish relationships among teachers. Professional development exercises in Métis places educate directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff in Métis knowledge and heritage, enabling staff members to grow more comfortable formulating practices and curricula influenced by Métis knowledge.

- The work on infusing and embedding Métis perspectives across the curriculum is ongoing because “there are countless opportunities to weave Aboriginal content into any subject” (McGregor 2009, 7)
- Emphasize the needs of the whole child—spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical
- Support all students to become resilient citizens with an informed awareness of the Métis Nation and the history and legacy of colonization
- Work with the Métis community to develop curriculum for all learners—Métis and non-Métis—that depicts Métis history accurately, shares an understanding of the history of colonization, as well as contemporary challenges, and pays critical attention to the evolving definitions of Métis identities (cultural/legal/local/national)
- Create a space for Métis students, families, and communities in schools to share and celebrate their history, culture, perspectives, and knowledge with everyone  
Directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, and staff must help create spaces for Métis in schools, to share and celebrate Métis history, culture, perspectives, and knowledge with school communities. However, such spaces must be spaces where all learners share, according to Tookenay (interview 2011).
- Recognize that there are a plurality of interpretations and experiences of Métis culture shared among students, families, and school board staff

- Welcome Métis Senators, Elders, knowledge holders, and community members into classrooms and schools to help educate staff and learners on topics relevant to Métis knowledge and heritage in curricula
- Encourage Métis family members, especially parents, to visit schools regularly, acting as helpers, resource people, role models, and consultants to help improve Métis student self-identification, attendance, achievement, pride, and academic success
- Connect employers and post-secondary institutions in the board's region to Métis youth to support employment and training

One of the TBCDSB's most important internship programs has extensive hands-on learning opportunities for students who are near graduation but not currently registered as a student in one of the board's high schools (Bragنالo, interview 2011). It is the Ontario Public Service Work and Learn program. There are:

seventeen to nineteen kids each semester with a teacher ... the kids are brought in for a week. A lot of these students have left our schools, and we bring them back. I think our number of Aboriginal students is probably at least 50 percent. To qualify, the students must be approximately ten or fewer credits short of graduation. They do a co-op credit in the classrooms (i.e., [working on] resumes). Then they go to work in Ontario public service jobs (i.e., the Ministry of Natural Resources, social services, and corrections). They go through interviews and they get paid minimum wage. And they are under the auspices of a manager with whom they meet regularly to go through performance appraisals and they get five credits toward graduation. By getting paid, the students are able to support, for example, children. Some of the kids need that, or the parents cannot afford to give them money. Some of the former participants have been able to secure permanent jobs while others have been able to continue working part time after the completion of the term of work and fulfillment of the requirements for the high school credits. (*ibid.*)

The 2010 to 2011 school year marked the third year of the board's "participation in this program" (*ibid.*). The Ontario Public Service Work and Learn program provides opportunities for learners to try different types of work in the civil service that may later help them to make decisions on courses to take to complete high school, and the decision to attend college and/or

university (*ibid.*, and see Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle in McGregor 2009, 9, 28 and Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre in McGregor 2009, 36).

- Enhance hiring policies to employ Métis as directors, superintendents, vice-principals and principals, teachers, liaison officers, social workers, etc. in English and French and public and Catholic boards
- Ensure that all students and staff recognize the importance of Métis education and perspectives and are aware of all Métis initiatives in school boards, especially those flowing from the “Framework”.

*The MNOET should:*

- Continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Education on implementation of the “Framework” and related initiatives
- Continue to independently monitor the implementation of the “Framework” and provide the ministry with updates in a timely fashion
- Work with the Ministry of Education to develop and review curriculum and supplementary resources that reflect Métis histories and contemporary Métis identities
- Work with the ministry to develop an accessible electronic database to connect school boards and teachers around the province with Métis educational philosophies, curricula, and practices. The ministry needs to take financial responsibility for this initiative, supplying administrative personnel with expertise in such educational technologies
- Ensure Métis knowledge, perspectives, and histories are valued and preserved for current and future generations, including the Michif language
- Build relationships with boards to identify and address educational experiences in school, enhancing curricula to reflect more accurately Métis history
- Work with community members to build a critical mass of Métis resource people—Anglophone, Francophone and Michif--to be present in schools.

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