

# IMPROVING LEARNING for Aboriginal Students



The recent apology by the federal government to Aboriginal Canadians for past mistreatment was a historic step in righting some of the wrongs that have been done in the name of better educational opportunities for Aboriginal youth.

However the appropriate focus on past mistakes should not overshadow the many positive efforts being made today by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational and community leaders to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Organizations and individuals across the province are working in co-ordination to gain a greater understanding of how to improve the learning environment for Aboriginal young people.

A key element in promoting academic success for Aboriginal students is teacher education. We need to produce more qualified Aboriginal teachers and better prepare all teachers who work with Aboriginal students.

The Ministry of Education has developed an Aboriginal education policy framework to lay out how the overall goal is to be met. It has established the Aboriginal Education Office to support school boards and schools as they implement initiatives that will identify barriers to success and find ways of eliminating them.

The Ontario College of Teachers has formed a cross-departmental work group under the leadership of the deputy registrar to address the issue of certification of Aboriginal teachers. The work group and the Ministry of Education have met to exchange information on our respective initiatives and to co-ordinate our efforts. Over the coming months, the work group will implement various strategies to expand services for Aboriginal teachers and those who teach Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal educators and organizations played a part in the recent review we conducted on teachers' qualifications. Their input helped us to update professional learning qualifications. New and practising teachers will soon be able to enrol in courses such as Aboriginal Peoples: Understanding Traditional Teachings, Histories, Current Issues and Cultures, separate courses for teaching languages such as Cayuga, Delaware, Ojicree and Oneida, and advanced courses in native studies and native languages.

Information about the content of these courses, and which providers will be approved to offer them will be posted to the College website as it becomes available.

We are currently revising the guideline for the Principal's Qualification Program to ensure that the preparation for school leadership includes an understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and forms of leadership. Consultations with Aboriginal organizations will be a key part of this process.

This is in keeping with the College's approach to change. The teaching profession's ethical standards already reflect Aboriginal input. One of the four ethical standards is respect for spirituality, freedom, social justice and the environment. These are all concepts in part drawn from the Aboriginal community during the creation of the standards and subsequently embraced by the profession.

Other educational stakeholders are also actively engaged in supporting this work.

The College has accredited Brock University's four-year degree program in Aboriginal teacher education and another Ontario faculty is developing a similar program. These programs will be open to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal candidates.

These are resources you will find useful in encouraging your teaching and other staff to improve their capacity for working with Aboriginal students. Other resources are being developed that your boards will likely share with you as part of their policy development for the success of Aboriginal students.

We have an opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of Aboriginal students through these initiatives. The real test of our success will be found in the inclusive environment we create for all our students as they leave school to create a productive and satisfying work and home life.

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