Education for the Seventh Generation: A First Nations School Reform Model

by

Barry M. Montour

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

Faculty of Education

McGill University

Montreal, QC Canada

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DEDICATION

“Tekhenonhwera:tons ne Ronatonhe'tston, Onkwe'shon:'a Ionkienawa:se, o'k o:ni ne Tahatikonhsata:kie.”

“I acknowledge and give thanks and greetings to those who have passed, to the people who have helped me, as well as to the Faces yet to come.”

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My journey to the Ph.D. has been filled with many twists and turns, and the road traveled has been both exhilarating and exhausting. I can trace the beginning of my journey back to my early educational experiences at three on-reserve schools in the communities of Kahnawake, Tuscarora, and Akwesasne. These experiences have shaped my understanding of the education system for First Nations children raised on-reserve, and I have first-hand knowledge of the challenges facing our children, having also taught in three of the on-reserve schools in Akwesasne.

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ABSTRACT

The conditions and context of First Nations students attending on-reserve schools is markedly different from the general population who attend provincially funded and managed school systems. The historical, political, and fiduciary relationship between First Nations and the federal government, due in large part to the inequity in funding levels for education, are just some of the challenges that First Nations struggle with in their attempt to provide their students with an education comparable to their provincial counterparts. The ability to appropriately and accurately assess the achievement of First Nation students in on-reserve schools has been greatly hindered by these conditions.

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and assess a research based comprehensive board-wide improvement plan in a First Nation school system, following the plan over a three year period. In addition to the research based practices advocated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the plan included locally developed performance indicators to assess growth and student achievement between the 2006/2007 and 2008/2009 school year. The question posed in this study sought to find out if the plan would bring the First Nation school system to the provincial standard, and additionally, if it would improve the perception of the school system held by community members.

The results from the provincial assessments over the three year period showed that the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education did not meet the provincial standard for either Grade 3 or Grade 6 in any of the assessed areas of reading, writing, or mathematics. The most significant amount of growth for both Grade 3 and Grade 6 occurred between Year 1 and Year 2 in the area of writing. However, all of these gains were lost in Year 3, when a political conflict in the community closed the schools for three days during the last week of the provincial assessments, which then led to the reconfiguration of the schools to the end of the school year. However, the results from the Canadian Test of Basic Skills showed improvements in all grade levels in the areas assessed.

ABRÉGÉ

Les conditions des élèves des Premières nations qui fréquentent les écoles des réserves, et le contexte dans lequel ils le font, sont fort différentes de ceux de l'ensemble de la clientèle des systèmes scolaires financés et gérés par les provinces. La relation aux plans historique, politique et fiduciaire entre les Premières nations et le gouvernement fédéral, dans une large mesure en raison des inégalités dans le financement de l'éducation, ne représentent que quelques-unes des difficultés que doivent affronter les Premières nations dans leur tentative de fournir à leurs élèves une éducation comparable à celle des jeunes de la province. La capacité d'évaluer de façon appropriée et avec rigueur la réussite des élèves des Premières nations des écoles des réserves a été grandement entravée par ces conditions.

L'objectif de cette étude était de développer, mettre en œuvre et évaluer pour l'ensemble du conseil dans un système scolaire des Premières nations un plan d'amélioration exhaustif fondé sur la recherche, et de suivre ce plan pendant une période de trois ans. En plus des pratiques basées sur la recherche préconisées par le ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario, le plan comprend des indicateurs de rendement élaborés à l'échelon local pour évaluer la croissance et la réussite des élèves entre les années scolaires 2006/2007 et 2008/2009. La recherche voulait vérifier si le plan amènerait le système scolaire des Premières

nations au niveau des normes provinciales, et en outre, s'il améliorerait la perception du système scolaire dirigé par des membres de la communauté.

Les résultats des évaluations provinciales de cette période de trois ans ont démontré que le Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education n'a pas satisfait les normes provinciales tant pour la 3e année ou pour la 6e année dans les domaines évalués, soit la lecture, l'écriture et les mathématiques. La croissance la plus significative pour les 3e et 6e années est survenue entre les années 1 et 2 dans le domaine de l'écriture. Cependant, tous ces gains étaient perdus en 3e année, lorsqu'un conflit politique dans la communauté a provoqué la fermeture des écoles durant trois jours au cours de la dernière semaine des évaluations provinciales, ce qui a mené à une reconfiguration des écoles à fin de l'année scolaire. Toutefois, les résultats du Canadian Test of Basic Skills ont montré des améliorations à tous les niveaux scolaires dans les domaines évalués.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

1.0 Introduction and Context of the Study

First Nations students in Canada face challenges in negotiating the terrain between Western education expectations for student achievement, and the long history of suspicion harboured among Indigenous people about the use of education as a tool to assimilate First Nations people into the dominant Western society. This study focuses on the unique First Nation territory of Akwesasne located along the St. Lawrence River region bordering Canada and the United States.

Akwesasne, permanently settled around 1752 as a Jesuit mission, straddles the U.S. and Canada border along the 45th parallel, and consists of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, as well as the State of New York (see Appendix 1). This unique geographic setting has presented many political and jurisdictional problems for not only Canada and the United States, but for the residents of Akwesasne as well. The international border that runs through the centre of the community has been responsible for the creation of two federally funded government structures, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council on the U.S.

side of the reserve, and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on the Canadian portion. In addition, the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs, often referred to as the Traditional Council, is the original governing body of Mohawk people and officially represents the Mohawks in the Grand Council in Onondaga (present day Syracuse, New York). It is these three governments operating in one community that has led to many of the internal and external conflicts over the years.

Akwesasne is a large First Nation with a long history going back a thousand years when the area was used for hunting and fishing. There is a strong sense of cultural identity in the community, which is prevalent in the artwork and graphics used throughout local businesses and organisations. Traditional arts and music are found in the community, and can be seen in the schools, heard on the local radio station, and at the well attended annual international pow-wow. Local Mohawk basket-makers are well known throughout the world, with baskets in the collections of many museums, including the Smithsonian and in the collection of the Vatican. Wooden lacrosse sticks, previously a staple used by all players before the emergence of plastic and metal sticks, are still produced at the only remaining wooden lacrosse stick factory in Akwesasne.

The community has proven its resilience through numerous struggles with outside authorities and governments, as well as with internal conflicts over

gambling, drugs, and cigarette manufacturing. While the lure of easy money is ever present, due primarily to the location of the international border, the community is well educated with a large number of students attending post secondary institutions who return to work in the community. Many are employed by the local government administrations of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, the Akwesasne Mohawk Casino and Bingo Palace, or the numerous small businesses and professional offices located throughout the reserve.

Akwesasne has five elementary schools, two of which offer full immersion in the Mohawk language. The commitment to the preservation and use of the Mohawk language is evident in these programs, and the use of the Mohawk language on the local radio station is also a testament to this community wide commitment. While indigenous languages throughout North America are endangered and many have been lost, Akwesasne has made a concerted effort and seen great strides to ensure its survival in the community.

With such a wealth of physical, cultural, and intellectual resources and assets as a First Nation community, Akwesasne can offer insights into community resilience and growth that may prove useful for other First Nations as they make various plans or design projects for their communities.

1.1 Background to the Problem

Student achievement, or the lack thereof, particularly as measured by standardised performance assessments, is often seen as the key determinant in setting a school's reputation and the perception that the community has regarding their school system. Since the 1996 provincial inception of the Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) for assessment in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10, and with federal intervention into state controlled education with the No Child Left Behind legislation in the United States (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, PL 107-110), the push for assessing schools using standardised testing results and for holding districts accountable for student performance has been in the forefront of education once again. As always, school districts are left scrambling to put into place school or district-wide improvement plans to boost student achievement and improve the perception of the school in the community.

Just how effective these plans are, in either boosting test scores or improving the reputation of the school, is not often assessed. As part of general practice, school boards, often working in isolation, or under pressure from provincial or state departments of education, develop school improvement plans, often with little or only cursory involvement from all stakeholders. The plans are

then haphazardly implemented, and then the board moves on, often developing another plan after five years. This cycle is repeated again and again, with the greatest piece always missing: a comprehensive assessment of the outcomes of the plan.

School improvement in First Nations communities in Canada brings with it numerous challenges not found in the general population, primarily due to the historical, political, and fiduciary relationship between First Nations and the Canadian federal government. Improving student performance and achievement in an effort to provide First Nations students with comparables to their provincial counterparts is an ongoing struggle given the discrepancy in funding levels and the lack of second level services that a provincial ministry of education provides to its school boards in the province.

According to Mendelson (2009), whole system reform, and thus improvement, is impossible because of the "existing non-system of First Nations education" (p. 4). The clear lack of infrastructure, physical, human, and system, contributes to the challenges that First Nations face without the educational and administrative resources found in their provincial counterparts. While some individual First Nations have been able to offer their students a better education (Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007a), these examples appear to be few and far between.

With 61% of First Nation students attending an on-reserve school (Mendelson, 2009, p. 3), school improvement and thus improving student achievement for First Nations students is vitally important. First Nations students in Canada continue to underperform when compared to non-Natives, including other minority groups (p. 5). This underachievement is often played out in the media and contributes to the negative perception of First Nations peoples by the general population. However, according to Statistics Canada (2006), the aboriginal population is the fastest growing group in Canada, growing at a rate of 45% between 1996 and 2006, compared to just 8% for the non-aboriginal population, and with aboriginal people on the verge of entering the workforce in the largest numbers of any other group in the country (Lamontagne, 2004). If First Nations people are to enter the workforce with the skills necessary, or gain entrance into post secondary institutions, school systems on-reserve must be at least of comparable quality to those found in the provincial school system.

In this chapter, the conceptual underpinnings for school reform movements in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and within First Nations school systems in Canada are reviewed. The problem and purpose of the study are stated, the limitations are noted, and then key terminology is defined.

1.2 Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

The debate over the future of education which led to widespread reform and the push for public accountability was spurred on in the United States with the release of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. A fear rang out that the United States education system was "raising a new generation of Americans that is scientifically and technologically illiterate" (p. 12). The report highlighted statistics showing declines in achievement scores, particularly in the Scholastic Aptitude Test, which at the time was used as the primary examination for entrance into colleges and universities.

Following the report came numerous books and proposed methods on how to improve the education system, which started a cottage industry of publishing and educational consulting. One notable example was the Cultural Literacy series by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1988). He posited that there was a decline of literate knowledge, and that one needed to be culturally literate in order to "thrive in the modern world" (pp. xiii). Hirsch noted that "the failure of our schools to create a literate society is sometimes excused on the grounds that the schools have been asked to do too much" (p. 25) and that the "blame should fall on faulty theories promulgated in our schools of education and accepted by educational

policy makers" (p. 110). He found attentive listeners in the U.S., including many parents, and found success with a series of books based on "what every student should know."

In Ontario, province wide school reform came with the election of Mike Harris as premier in 1995 and his "Common Sense Revolution" platform. The Harris government took drastic steps to reform education in the province, including removing the tax base from local school boards, eliminating the fifth year of high school, and mandating a standardised curriculum. Most dramatic, Harris established the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), which introduced provincial-wide standardised testing for students. A policy to test teachers on a regular basis, as a requirement for certification, was introduced but later dropped after much resistance from teacher federations.

The Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office, an arm's length organisation of the Ministry of Education, develops and administers annual testing for students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 10. The results are made available to the general public on the website, and show each school's results compared to the provincial average.

The Fraser Institute, the social policy think tank founded in 1974 in Vancouver, B.C., uses the provincial examination results to rank each school in Ontario and introduced report cards for secondary schools in 2001 and then for

elementary schools in 2003. For elementary schools, the Institute uses nine academic performance indicators to rate the schools, including the average level of achievement in math, reading, and writing for Grades 3 and 6, the difference by gender, and the percentage of assessments that did not meet the provincial average (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 5). Each school in the province is given a placement score out of ten and put on a list to show how the school fares compared to the other three thousand or so schools in the province. In order for a school to show improvement in its overall score, it must improve at a rate "faster than the average" (p. 7), but if it improves "at a rate less than the average, it will show a decline in its rating" (p. 236). The Institute's rating system has not been without its detractors, due in part to its methodology (B.C. School Trustees Association, 2008; Ontario Public School Boards Association, 2007), its perceived favouritism for private schools (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 16), and its rejection by the Education Quality Accountability Office (www.eqao.on.ca/faq).

In the United States, the reauthorisation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 by President George W. Bush introduced standards based education reform under the title of No Child Left Behind. The Act requires a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom, regular testing and assessments for all students, and disaggregated testing data to ensure that all students, including minorities and students with special needs, make "adequate yearly progress."

Annual school reports, detailing the individual school's results on the performance assessments, are published and made available on the state department's website. Newspapers regularly publish the results of their local school district to show accountability to local taxpayers.

In the United Kingdom, school improvement on a national level began with a national curriculum and testing in the late 1980's, and then again in 1998 and 1999 with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, a large scale government initiated school reform effort aimed at "changing teacher practice and thus improving pupil performance" (Earl, Ali, & Lee, 2003, p. 11). The effort was ambitious, and sought to make significant changes in the nearly 20,000 primary schools and over 190,000 teachers in England within six years. While experiencing some initial gains in student achievement on the national assessments during the first several years (p. 20), the initiative now faces the challenges associated with sustaining continued improvement.

School improvement for on-reserve First Nations students in Canada has not been organised on a large scale, but found only in small pockets on an individual basis. Bell (2004) and Fulford (2007a) have documented cases of promising practices related to school improvement in aboriginal educational settings, but not on a large effort such as those found in the United States, England, or Ontario. Funding from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs

Canada is granted to individual First Nations on a proposal driven basis for projects that may or may not address school improvement. Many First Nations utilise the funds to supplement a shortfall in core funding, and generally purchase textbooks, instructional resources, and new computers. Further, not all First Nations schools receive the funding, as the amount of funds tends to be relatively low given the number of First Nations schools in each province.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Improving student achievement for First Nations students who attend federally funded on-reserve schools presents many challenges not found in provincially funded and school board operated schools in Canada. Primary to the challenge is the disparity in funding and the lack of support services offered by a ministry or department of education. In this study, this central problem is posited in the analysis of a First Nations school system.

Therefore, the current study intends to develop a model for school improvement in First Nations schools by documenting the development, implementation, and assessment of a district-wide school improvement plan in a First Nations community, following the plan over a three-year period. The core question to be answered in this study is “Will the development and

implementation of a comprehensive school improvement plan, following a research-based model and the development of locally based indicators, bring a First Nation school board to the provincial standard, as well as improve the perception of its schools as held by community members?"

1.4 Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

Limitations

There is great diversity amongst First Nations people, including language, dialect among language groups, lifestyle, spiritual beliefs, traditional political organisations, cultural practices, and familial relationships and hierarchy. There is also great diversity found within First Nations school systems and structures. With over 500 recognised First Nation reserves in Canada, it is not surprising then to find these school systems, and indeed the First Nations themselves, at various stages and abilities in administering their school systems. Due to this, the ability to generalize the outcomes of this study is limited. However, this study does focus narrowly on one First Nation community that produces criteria for excellence in assessing and affirming student achievement levels that may be useful to other First Nations educators.

Assumptions

This study shares the assumptions with other national and international educational research movements described in the Conceptual Underpinnings section above. This study:

- assumes that using a research based approaches for school improvement planning would be appropriate in a First Nation school setting.
- assumes that a case study research design was the most appropriate for fulfilling the purpose of this study.

These assumptions provide the foundation for the study in the First Nation community of Akwesasne.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

The following terms, used throughout this study, are defined below. Many Mohawk words and terms, as well as local terms, are also used in this study. Some words are used interchangeably to describe the same place and these are noted. Several pronunciations using the International Phonetic Alphabet appear in brackets. The following list and definitions are included to assist the reader:

Aboriginal: refers to the original people of North America, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education / AMBE: the school board under study in the community of Akwesasne, which was created by resolution of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne in 1985; funded by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The spelling uses the "h" which represents an aspiration in the pronunciation, and is based on the Mohawk Language Standardisation Project (Lazore, 1993).

Akwesasne: the Mohawk community under study, located on the shores of the St. Lawrence River; encompasses Canada and the United States, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the State of New York. When referring to the community, the "h" is not used in the spelling.

Band: term used by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to describe a federally recognised and funded First Nation under the Indian Act.

Director of Education: chief administrator of a school board in Ontario; sometimes referred to as the school superintendent.

First Nations: refers to the indigenous or first peoples in Canada, both Status and Non-Status, but particularly those recognised as Indians under the Indian Act.

INAC: acronym for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the federal department responsible for Indians in Canada under the Indian Act of 1876.

Kana:takon: District of Akwesasne in the province of Quebec; also known as the Village of St. Regis; location of the Kana:takon School (formerly St. Regis Village School); Mohawk word literally meaning “village”; word origin of Canada [ganadag^].

Kawehnoke: District of Akwesasne in the province of Ontario, directly across from the city of Cornwall, Ontario; in Mohawk, meaning “island”; also known as Cornwall Island; location of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School (formerly the Cornwall Island Indian Day School).

Mohawk Council of Akwesasne: elected body established through the Indian Act for governing the Canadian portion of the reserve; formerly known as the St. Regis Band Council.

St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council: Elected body established by the United States federal government and the State of New York to govern the American portion of the reservation.

Trustees: members of the Board elected from their district to the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education to serve a three year term.

Tsi Snaihne: District of Akwesasne in the province of Quebec; also referred to as Chenail and Snye; location of the Tsi Snaihne School (formerly the Chenail Indian Day School) [dZisninE].

1.6 Overview of the Thesis

In this introduction a framework for research on assessment and achievement models for a First Nation in Canada is outlined. As discussed, the call for improving education includes the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom as exemplars of education reform, although it is understood that an inventory of other countries such as Australia could be useful. However, this analysis is outside the framework of this study. Both the United States and the United Kingdom provide a cultural and historical context within the postcolonial era as relevant for the Mohawk First Nation community of Akwesasne. Thus, this first chapter of the thesis includes a statement of the problem of the study, the background to the study, the purpose and significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, and the definition of terms.

In Chapter 2, the literature is reviewed as it relates to school reform movements over the past two decades in the United States and Canada. In Chapter 3, the reader is provided with a background in First Nations education in

Canada. In Chapter 4, the challenges facing First Nations schools in Canada in their attempt at improving student achievement and educational attainment is discussed. Chapter 5 outlines the procedures followed in designing the study, collecting data, and analyzing the results. Chapter 6 provides the results of data analyses and findings of the study. In Chapter 7, a summary of the research study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations is presented. This inquiry uses a research-based model that is described in more detail throughout the study.

In conclusion, the experience and knowledge of the researcher as a senior administrator in a First Nations school system formed the basis of the study. In this way the daily practice had a useful context for the theoretical frameworks described in this study. For example, a combination of graduate education, teaching experiences in three on-reserve schools, and previous participation in a school reform program provided direct experience and knowledge that informed the decision-making processes when designing the school improvement plan. Therefore, this study seeks to improve the quality of life of First Nations children that is at the heart of teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

2.0 Introduction

A current literature search shows an abundance of school reform models and the educational companies that specialise in and offer services to develop school reform measures are numerous. In this chapter I review recent literature with the purpose of situating this study within the landscape of education reform. This study seeks to produce a model for evaluation and assessment reform in First Nations schools using research-based practices and the development of locally produced performance indicators. To accomplish this, I review literature over the past thirty years.

The pressure for educational reform stems from several areas. On one level, there are the political interests that drive reform movements as part of political platforms geared towards ensuring accountability of public funds. The political pressure can come from both the provincial / state level, and the federal government level, as evidenced by the reform movement spurred on by the Harris government in Ontario, or the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in the United States.

On another level, educational reform programs and initiatives have come from the educational research conducted through university studies (Brant, 2004). Their application has tended to be quantitative in design and includes statistical analysis of student achievement, as found in the Dallas Independent School District discussed later in this chapter.

Lastly, there are local school-based reform and improvement initiatives that stem primarily from the school district's administrative leader or local board of education. The pressure for reform comes from within the school district, although the outside pressures from government have a direct influence. On a local level, the resources from the other two levels of reform are utilised, and indeed even funding may be secured. However, the motivation for improvement is internal, and the primary pressure for reform comes from within the school district itself. It is this internal pressure for school reform and student achievement that is the focus of this study.

2.1 School Reform Research in North America

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program (Beuchler, 2002) identified two central themes that are present in effective school

reform models: the reform should be comprehensive and school-wide, and the reform must be research-based.

Following the two central themes, the CSRD identified nine components that "research has shown to be important to successful efforts to improve achievement for all children" (p. 12). The components include: using research-based methods and strategies, aligning the school's curriculum with challenging standards; offering high quality and on-going professional development; creating measurable goals and benchmarks aligned to state standards; ensuring support from all stakeholders; garnering strong parental involvement and engagement; creating networks with experts in the field, including universities; using multiple and varied forms of assessments; and using current funding without dependence on new sources. In order for the reform to be successful, schools must "overcome the barriers of change and take advantage of external support" by providing professional development opportunities, offering sufficient authority and flexibility, building and managing community support, and garnering needed resources (p. 19).

In the *National Study of School Evaluation*, (2004), the researchers identified the organisational conditions and effective school practices to improve student learning through the meta-analysis of current research studies using a qualitative approach through data reduction, categorising, and conclusion

drawing to develop themes across and within categories. The categories were then arranged as “conditions” and “core tasks.”

The conditions that were identified as necessary for improving school systems were:

1. effective leadership and practices to support student learning;
2. policies and practices that sustain the school or district’s improvement;
3. resources to support systems that will sustain improvement, including human, technology, and material resources;
4. the recruitment, placement, and professional development of quality teachers to achieve the desired results; and
5. the collection, management and use of information to support the school or district’s vision of student learning.

The three “core tasks” and effective practices that were identified to improve teaching and learning were:

1. ensure desired results by maintaining high expectations for student learning;
2. improve teaching and learning with a rigorous curriculum and an assessment system that is aligned with the curriculum, by providing student support services and special programs to maximize student learning, and by involving families and the community;

3. foster a culture of improvement that focuses on student learning, embeds improvement in daily practices, and supports a culture of collegiality, collaboration, respect, and peer reflection.

Wendel (2000) sought to identify practices in twelve schools in three provinces that contribute to high student achievement outcomes for low-socioeconomic status students. In addition to focusing on student achievement, the study looked at the organisational, social, instructional, cultural, and other factors that contribute to student growth.

The four central findings that emerged from this review were that:

1. teachers make the difference in these successful schools;
2. internal consistencies need to address the expectations, rules, decision-making, and focus on doing what really matters;
3. schools must analyze results to make improvements; and lastly,
4. parent and community involvement is related to the school environment and teacher collegiality.

Three additional key findings of the review were generated. First, socio-economic status was found to play an important role in student achievement and

the attainment of outcomes, but it was noted that schools can make a difference with quality teachers offering quality instruction. Second, school effectiveness is the degree to which schools add value to the educational achievements of its students, and third, school improvement is neither a simple or easy process, but committed teachers need to be supported and encouraged in the school improvement process, as they make a difference in the efforts.

On a local school level, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced the *School Effectiveness Framework*, which was a provincial pilot project in Ontario public schools during the 2007/08 school year (Ontario, 2007c). The framework's intent is to deepen "instructional effectiveness and pedagogy" by " focusing on professional accountability and networks" (p. 1), and to meet the Ministry's three priorities of achieving high levels of student achievement, reducing the gaps in student achievement, and increasing the public's confidence in education (p. 2).

The framework has four essential components:

1. Curriculum and Instructional Strategies
2. Student Learning and Achievement
3. Instructional Leadership
4. Assessment and Evaluation

All four of these components are designed to meet the primary goal of equity of student outcomes. The responsibility for the school improvement process is left with a school improvement team headed by the school principal, who undertakes a self-assessment to answer the following three questions (Ontario, 2007c, pp. 9 - 11):

- How effective are we in achieving our student learning and achievement goals?
- What is the evidence?
- What actions will we take to ensure continuous improvement?

The *School Effectiveness Framework* provides indicators in each of the target areas, and schools are required to find evidence of such in their school, including the use of rubrics, exemplars, anchor papers, teacher modelling, differentiation of instruction, co-teaching, high levels of student engagement, and parental involvement. Once the initial review is complete, a report is compiled and shared with the entire school staff. The entire process is centered on continuous improvement and is central to the work of Professional Learning Communities in each school, as "staff members determine their ongoing capacity-building needs and identify strategies for implementation" (Ontario, 2007c, p. 12).

The school review process is not considered an evaluative tool, rather it is considered formative in nature, designed to provide “reflection and feedback for improvement and action planning” (p. 23) through observation and analysis and is intended to “foster a climate of collaboration in and across schools and across districts” (p. 25).

In Canada, one of the best known school improvement models, the Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP), developed for secondary schools by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation in 1991, has “outlasted many other school improvement networks around the world and has become an integral part of education in Manitoba” (Earl, Ali, & Lee, 2003, p. 4). The focus of the program is on whole-school improvement at the secondary level, and includes a framework for student learning, curriculum, and instruction. The philosophy entails “mobilizing the involvement of teachers, students, parents, and the community; connecting to the outside world; broadening leadership; engaging in inquiry and reflection; creating coherence and integration; and increasing schools’ capacity for change” (p. 5).

The study investigated thirty one schools in Manitoba organised into three groups based on the length of time they were involved in the program, and addressed the issues of program implementation, impact, and sustainability in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the MSIP approach to school reform

(Lee, 1999). Additionally, the researchers sought to identify the strategies present in the approach that had a positive impact on the learning experiences and outcomes for students, and particularly for those students considered at risk.

Primary to the successes of the MSIP in Manitoba are the similar affects it has had on the movement for change and reform in education in general, as well as acting to "accelerate the pace of change" (p. 77). The development of educational networks "to improve schools by facilitating professional communities and linking ideas to actions" (p. 73) was also noted, as well as to build capacity through on-going inquiry and reflection. Within these professional learning communities, decision making practices developed into research based practices, and the understanding that "to move toward meaningful change schools need to plan from, and reflect upon, evidence-based data" (p. 75). The theme of "students as critical stakeholders in education" and giving students a voice "helped to raise a level of consciousness" (p. 77) that students can and should be involved in shaping the questions that need to be asked in schools.

The challenges faced throughout the course of the MSIP were many. Central to the findings is that the program "has not managed to promote the kind of change in schools that had been hoped for" (p. 78), particularly in creating and maintaining the pressure needed to sustain change and to keep the staff motivated. The researchers found that "the momentum is lost as the project

matures" (p. 79) and principals have to "recreate awareness and engage the staff" as the program moves into different phases. The ability of teachers and administrators to adequately use the data that were being generated was questioned as staff struggled to understand "how useful it is and how it should be used." The task of keeping the focus on student learning and making changes at the classroom level, by "altering structural and/or institutional arrangements" and by "changing the hearts and minds of all educational stakeholders" (p.80) was cited, as the researchers "heard little to suggest that there were many dramatic changes to what happened in classrooms" (p.81). Finally, and most importantly, the "results in relation to measurable changes in school improvement processes, students' engagement and students learning" were found to be "modest" (p.72).

The lessons learned from MSIP were categorized into four key themes: urgency (energy, agency, and more energy), inquiry-mindedness, broadening leadership, and pressure and support. Urgency, or the impetus for change, was seen as central to successfully implementing the program and to institutionalising the process of continuous school improvement. The need to raise the bar and close the gap between high and low performing students was cited as a necessary component in moving schools from paradigm paralysis to penetrate the way secondary schools work. Energy and the human side of change were

cited as integral since ownership in the change process was needed to allow schools the internal capacity to take charge of change.

2.2 The Use of Statistical Methods in School Reform

Determining the effectiveness of a plan through student achievement by developing a statistical model to assess effectiveness is a complex and contentious endeavour, but one that has been tackled by Webster and Mendro (1995) using an ordinary least squares (OLS) equation and multivariate regression model. Defining effectiveness and then accurately and validly developing a model to assess that effectiveness has been a controversial issue, particularly when a financial incentive or recognition award for student achievement is involved. To address this, the Webster & Mendro model statistically adjusts the outcome variables by the inputs that are related to the performance indicators developed by the school district. The model eliminates the variable in outcomes associated with student contextual variables over which the school or board has no control (confounders). This model is currently being utilised by the Dallas Independent School District to define a school's effectiveness in relation to performance set by the district.

In a study from the Dallas Public School System, simulated data were used to test whether hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) is appropriate for ranking schools when the sample sizes within schools (i.e., class sizes) are not large. Using class sizes of between five and twenty-one students, Weerasinghe and Orsak (1998) investigated the effect of sample size on the ability to rank schools, using pre-test and post-test data, and using effect size and class size as the parameters. After one hundred simulations were carried out, using one hundred rankings of the schools, the results were compared to the school's true ranking. With a cut-off correlation of 0.90, the authors determined that the HLM method produced accurate results, although when the cut-off correlation was increased to 0.97, the use of HLM accuracy was diminished. However, not one of the single simulation runs was able to rank the schools in the exact order. Class size and effect size were both equally important for successful rankings, and based on the results of this simulation study, HLM is considered a useful method to rank schools, provided that class size is relatively large with respect to the effects that distinguish any two schools.

The use of multiple indicators and the disaggregation of the data to monitor achievement for all groups of students, based on race, socio-economic status, special education identification, gender, and average family education level are some of the areas required by the U.S. federal *No Child Left Behind*

(NCLB) legislation. The establishment of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) objectives for individual States is based on "schools increasing the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or higher by at least one point per year" (Linn, Baker, and Betebenner, 2002, p.7). This criterion would not be met by most states, and according to the legislation, schools would be identified as needing improvement, a label that brings with it certain sanctions. This is due in large part to the way state departments of education set their performance and content standards. The standards are often set so high that the attainment of proficiency for all students, as mandated by NCLB, is unrealistic, particularly for all of the subgroups within the student body. To further compound this problem, the interpretation of "proficient" or "passing" carries different meanings within each state and can be quite ambiguous (p. 4).

A review of the trends in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standards set by states shows much variation, particularly in the range of scores, from a low of 27% to a high of 92%. The starting point between schools is of such a large range that the ability of those schools that begin on the low end makes it mathematically impossible to reach a level of proficiency by 2014, the date set by the federal government where all students must meet or exceed proficiency levels. Within the subgroups, such as low socio-economic status,

and ethnic minorities, attainment of the AYP proficiency levels will be more difficult, if not impossible.

Volatility in school results, due to measurement error and sampling error, can also be significantly influenced by other factors, such as staff turnover, or even a particularly difficult cohort group. Linn, et al (2002) suggests that aggregating the data over three years will help reduce the volatility and lead to more trustworthy classifications of schools than only 2 years of data. The longitudinal tracking of students from year to year, rolling averages of two or more years of results, the use of composite scores across subjects and grades, and the use of separate grade-by-subject area results are suggested as alternatives to "help ameliorate instability problems caused by differences in successive cohorts of students" (p. 4).

The use of cut scores (selected points on the score scale of a test) by NCLB is cited as being narrow "does not give schools credit for broad increases in student achievement" (p. 13) and does not recognise the improvement of students who make significant increases in achievement if their score is still below the cut score. The authors suggest that in addition to longitudinally tracking student performance, the use of scale scores (basic, proficient, advanced) with an index be developed to monitor progress, which would give credit to changes in the mean scale scores.

The Dallas Public School system is an illustrative example of a school district that uses a three tier accountability system (Webster & Mendro, 1998). The first tier is the school level, the second tier involves the district improvement plan, and the third tier involves school effectiveness indices. The indices are value-added, and include student background and school contextual variables. Performance indicators are determined by a school level committee called the Accountability Task Force, who is appointed by the Board of Education. The Task Force represents all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and members of the business community.

Annual needs assessments are conducted and specify school levels on outcome variables, which are then used as the basis for a strategic school improvement plan. Data are used to establish priorities and goals, and places "decision-making responsibility and accountability at the local level" (p. 4). Resources are then projected based on the needs and the goals set by the Task Force, and if necessary, compromises are made.

Once program implementation begins, staff members are responsible "for providing continuous formative feedback" (p. 4) in two categories, process evaluation and interim product evaluation. The evaluation of process includes looking at problems with procedures, how information is gathered for decision making, and the maintenance of record keeping procedures. Process evaluation

is focused on “obtaining information for improvement,” while interim product evaluation “provides periodic feedback to the schools relative to the attainment of specific sub-objectives during the implementation phase” (p. 5). Examples of product evaluation include student portfolios, performance testing, teacher-made tests, and other formative assessments.

Action research studies by teachers are encouraged, a process in which teachers “actively learn while they study problems in contexts that they generally perceive as relevant and important” (p. 6) and with results that are used to supplement the more formal assessments.

A report is generated at the end of the school year that provides up to four years of disaggregated data on all relevant outcome and input variables and is used to determine whether or not schools met their School Improvement Plan goals (p. 6) and then to assist in the development of goals for the upcoming year. The District Improvement Plan includes aspects of the school plans, but with a five year time-line. Training for staff is seen as essential if they are to utilise the data that is generated and the author states that “accountability without information for diagnosis and improvement is of limited utility” (p. 6).

School effectiveness indices are developed to “measure a school’s effect” and establishes “student levels of performance based on expectations” and determines “the extent to which its students, on the average, exceed or fall short

of expectation" (p. 8). Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) with student level variables and multiple regression analysis is used to compute prediction equations by grade level for each outcome variable to determine if students made gains in achievement over the predicted gains. Levels of performance are weighted by the Task Force to provide "an indicator of how well a school performs relative to other schools" (p. 9).

To produce effectiveness indices, a basic ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model is developed, which eliminates the variance in outcomes associated with student contextual variables, such as student background variables, over which the schools have no control. The Dallas HLM model is two-stage, two-level random, that includes school level contextual variables such as mobility, school size, average family education, average family poverty, free or reduced lunch status, ethnicity, and English language proficiency, among others. Criterion variables include achievement on a variety of standardised tests, diagnostic assessments, school promotion rate, school graduation rate, school enrolment in advanced level courses, and school dropout rates, among others.

The author posits that the Dallas Public Schools accountability system uses "an objective procedure for identifying effective schools" that is "designed to foster teamwork among school staffs," does not reward individual competition

among teachers within schools," and "focuses attention on the important outcomes of schooling" (p. 14).

Heck (2006) compared the achievement estimates from different methodologies to determine school effectiveness: successive cohorts and longitudinal cohorts were compared against the cut score approach used by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). The study involved a multilevel sample of 123 elementary schools and focused on the methodologies accuracy, equity, and usefulness of the results.

The methodology used by NCLB is a cut score measure (pre-determined) to indicate if a school and student sub-groups within the school meet or surpass the pre-determined proficiency target, which focuses on status at the time of the test, rather than on growth. The successive cohort model uses aggregated achievement scores from successive student cohorts to assess year-to-year school achievement, with value added adjustments to control for school effects. However, this approach makes the assumption that the student characteristics that affect achievement are stable for students who attend the same school, and does not take into consideration the sampling variability of students taking the tests. The composition of students taking the test changes from year to year (from cohort to cohort), and therefore the results can be confounded by these changes.

The longitudinal student cohort model focuses on the “changes in the same individuals within a school through a specified period of time” (p. 673). The examination of individual student growth looks at gains in scores over time, modeling their covariate adjusted scores, and modeling their growth trajectories over at least three measurements. In this method, the level of the outcomes and the change over time are measured concurrently, which reduces sampling variability because the students serve as their own controls. Further, it is considered a more accurate method because of the use of multiple assessments, which is considered more stable than the one score approach.

Growth trajectories allow for multilevel modeling, where both the school and individual classrooms can be measured in terms of their contribution to a student’s academic growth. If data is missing, due to student transfers and mobility, estimates can be generated for analysis. This approach is considered more flexible in determining accountability because it acknowledges “that schools serve students who begin at different places academically and progress at varying rates” (p. 674). The drawback to this longitudinal method is the amount of data collection required, the storage and retrieval of that information, the analyses involved, and the technical ability of school districts to adequately manage the process.

In Tennessee, the state uses a value-added accountability system, with data collected annually for all students, and focuses on academic gains rather than raw achievement scores which points accountability at student achievement rather than on absolute levels of achievement. In the Dallas Independent School District, a two-stage hierarchical linear model (HLM) analysis is used to measure student growth, with a threshold (or cut score) set by a task force to determine effectiveness. A multitude of variables is used to determine school effectiveness, including attendance, drop-out and retention rates, graduation rates, test scores, gender, ethnicity, and SES. North Carolina, and formerly New Mexico (before NCLB), use a quasi-longitudinal approach, employing “end of course” or “end of grade” scores, and compare to the previous year’s aggregate score, rather than on a predetermined score (as used with NCLB). The Chicago Public School System blends growth models to track achievement by comparing growth at the school level, while student progress is tracked using gains in scores. California, Louisiana and Kentucky use both a growth models and the performance accountability imposed by NCLB, but reports on them separately.

The drawback cited to the use of growth models to track student progress and to determine school effectiveness is the ability to collect, store, and analyse the large amounts of information needed for such a process. Further, how to weight the data, or what value to give individual variables, must be determined.

Finally, which method to use, from change scores, residual regression, mixed models, or HLM require further research and investigation, as one method does not fit all situations.

Statistical models can be used to determine the effectiveness of school improvement plans, as illustrated in the use of the status cohort model utilised by NCLB, or in value added growth trajectories currently being used or piloted in Dallas, Tennessee, Chicago, California, Louisiana, and Kentucky.

2.3 Summary

School reform movements over the past two decades have focused on public accountability measures, including reporting individual school results in a public forum. In Ontario, the Education Quality Accountability Office reports how each school fares compared to the other three hundred or so schools in the province. In the United States, under the *No child Left Behind* legislation, annual school reports detail individual school's results on performance assessments, which are published and made available on the state department's website. Research into the effectiveness of school reform models over the past ten years have shown that successful schools are those that are focused on continuous school improvement. The conditions that were determined to be present in

successful schools, and therefore were seen as useful for schools and school districts to put in place were:

1. understanding the change process in order to manage it effectively;
2. developing professional learning communities to continue to build capacity within staff and to encourage reflection of professional practice;
3. using research based instructional methods and strategies, including building networks with universities;
4. ensuring support from all stakeholders, including having strong parental involvement and engagement;
5. understanding that both school administrators and teachers have a significant impact in successful schools;
6. to continuously analyse school achievement results with a focus on student achievement.

The use of statistical models for school reform initiatives provides the data and information that state and provincial education departments need in their reporting requirements to both the government and to the general public. However, there are limitations, as discussed, in the use of many status or cohort designed assessments. This has led to the development of statistical growth

trajectories to follow individual students over the course of several years to track growth.

CHAPTER 3

First Nations Education in Canada: A Backgrounder

3.0 Introduction

Before school reform in First Nations schools is addressed, a review of the history of First Nations education in Canada is warranted. In the context of First Nations administrative control of education and devolution by the federal government since 1973, federal policy as it relates to band operated schools is reviewed. A discussion on the challenges that First Nations face as they administer band-operated schools looks at the lack of central educational support services for these school systems and the need for a comprehensive funding formula. Additionally, the following is addressed:

- current models for testing and assessment in the administration and delivery of education in First Nations communities;
- current testing models that are used in evaluating and assessing First Nations Education; and
- research-based school improvement practices.

These foci represent a context for what has been called Indian Education, but in the current era and in this study is referred to as First Nations education.

3.1 Introduction to First Nations Education in Canada

First Nation's jurisdiction over education is an integral component of aboriginal sovereignty and the right to self-government. Through the signing of eleven treaties with the British Crown and the Government of Canada between 1871 and 1921, First Nation's people in Canada secured provisions for the funding of education for Native children (Assembly of First Nations, 1988, pp. 2-3). In 1892, the federal government entered into agreements with churches by an Order-In-Council to operate schools for Native children (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Ward, 1988), the majority of which were Roman Catholic and Anglican. These agreements were in place until well into the 1960s. The delivery of education services based on these agreements evolved over the years, but included day schools located on reserves, industrial schools, residential boarding schools, convent schools, and provincial schools for which tuition agreements were negotiated.

In 1969, Prime Minister Trudeau released his government's position paper *The Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*. The aptly named White Paper proposed to abolish the *Indian Act* and the special status given to First Nations in Canada, transfer the responsibility for First Nations from the federal government to the provinces, and to dismantle the Department of Indian

Affairs (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1969, p. 6). These were radical changes to the government's policy and to how the Department was operating for over 100 years. Under the new policy, the federal government would transfer its administrative responsibility for the education of First Nations living on reserve to the provinces (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Kaegi, 1972). This new approach would be seen to breach the provisions in the treaties, and this treaty delegation of educational authority over to the provincial governments would not be accepted by First Nations easily (Youngblood-Henderson, 1995, pp. 245 – 261)

The response to the White Paper by Native groups was quick. Harold Cardinal (1969), Cree political leader and activist, published *The Unjust Society* as a response to both the 1969 White Paper and to Trudeau's declaration that Canada must be a "just society." Cardinal asserted that Canada's treatment of whooping cranes was more just than its treatment of Native people (p. 2) and that "to the Indian people, there can be no justice, no just society, until their rights are restored" (p. 25). He further surmised that the way to maintain one's culture was to remain as "Indians" as defined within the meaning of the Indian Act. Rather than repeal the Act altogether, Cardinal recommended reviewing it and ending the paternalistic policies that were endemic within the Department.

There has been much debate about the full intent of Trudeau's White Paper of 1969, among both Native and non-Native people. Put into the perspective of Pierre Trudeau and his upbringing as a Francophone living in Quebec, his intentions regarding improving the conditions of Canada's First Nations is understandable. Given the struggles of the Francophone population in the province, Trudeau had first-hand knowledge and experience as a member of a minority living in Canada. From his perspective, First Nations in Canada had also been sidelined by the dominant English society as second class citizens and had not been given the opportunities afforded to others living in the country. He felt that the Indian Act created a separate status that was discriminatory in nature and one that "led to a blind alley of deprivation and frustration" (p. 5). The parallels to the French in Canada are clear, and it is possible that Trudeau saw himself in the plight that Native people were in during that time period.

While Trudeau is largely cited and credited with the 1969 policy paper, it is generally understood to have come from Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs, and other bureaucrats within the Department. Cardinal (1969) was scathing in his assessment of the new minister, stating that "he came to his new responsibilities with little background in the problems of Indians" and that he "knew little of his duties and was forced to rely upon the good will and faith of his civil servant underlings" (p. 109). In what Cardinal termed legislative and

constitutional treachery, he asserted that Chrétien “signed what was thrust before him” (p. 109) and that the 1969 White Paper contained a “total lack of understanding possessed by its authors of the situation in which the Indians of Canada find themselves” (p. 112).

The National Indian Brotherhood (precursor to the Assembly of First Nations) responded by releasing a policy paper in 1972 titled *Indian Control of Indian Education*. The paper was a broad philosophy statement of education for Indian students in Canada, and identified parental involvement as a key determiner to their child’s success. This involvement was seen as a reflection of traditional norms and practices found in Native cultures. There was also a focus on culturally relevant and appropriate curriculum, including the teaching of Native languages, which was lacking in the provincial curriculum of the time. The document was divided into four areas: responsibility, programs, teachers, and facilities. The policy was accepted in principle by the federal government under Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs. Due in large part to the acceptance of the policy, the federal government began negotiating devolution agreements with First Nations to transfer the administration of the federal on-reserve schools directly to the First Nation (Carr-Stewart, 2004).

3.2 Band Operated Schools

After acceptance of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy by the federal government in 1973, First Nations in Canada began administering educational programs and operating the federally funded schools within their own communities, a task previously managed by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

The federal government began the devolution process with negotiated agreements whereby the Department turned over the management and operation of the former federal schools to the First Nation, usually to the Band Council, but in many cases to newly created education authorities or First Nation school boards.

Not all First Nation communities were ready for the transfer and takeover of the programs, as capacity building within the communities had not taken place beforehand, and it has taken the subsequent decades to build that capacity. While on the surface the transfer of control from the federal government to the First Nations seemed laudable and an integral step towards self government and self determination, the reality of such devolution is that First Nation communities inherited an underfunded and often dysfunctional education system. As noted by Agbo (2002), “devolution has not been designed by federal authorities to enable

schools and communities to successfully manage the changes within any specific objectives, policies, strategic plans, and curriculum initiatives" (p. 298).

All of the agreements lacked the necessary resources to provide First Nation schools with comparables to their provincial counterparts, and they lacked the ability to develop curriculum, provide on-going professional development to their teachers, and accurately assess the outcomes for their students. The lack of support services, such as those provided by a provincial ministry or department of education, is perhaps the greatest detriment in the assumption of local control. Unlike schools within the provinces, First Nation schools have no central support organisation to assist them with delivering their education programs.

This lack of support services has had a direct impact on the delivery of programs and the assessment of student achievement for First Nations students attending on-reserve schools. According to Mendelson (2008), this "is an old and outdated model of school organisation" that existed in the provinces before consolidation and amalgamation of rural school districts (p. 8). Without a central organisation to plan, monitor, and evaluate educational programming in First Nations schools, INAC has created an education system in Canada that "is grossly inefficient, ignores economies of scale" and "motivates mismanagement" (McCue, 2003, p. 1). This view is held by First Nations as well, as James Wilson

(2007), Director of Education of the Opsakwayak Educational Authority in Manitoba noted that First Nations schools are “underfunded, unregulated, and unsupported” (p. 248).

The funding levels and the Band Operated Funding Formula (BOFF) used by the Department has been an on-going concern. A 2005 report prepared by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch of Indian Affairs supports this assertion of underfunding. It found that the “current funding structure is based on a global formula rather than being targeted to the needs of communities” and that “core operating budgets for First Nations schools” are “not tied to a realistic pattern of education costs” (p. 6). Further, in the area of funding, the report found “no evidence that funding allocations from regional offices to First Nations were based on any rationale that takes the current structure of educational responsibilities into account” (p. 34).

According to Brady (1995) “the federal government may have agreed with the principle of Native control of Native education,” but “it has done little to transfer legislative control over education to First Nations government” (p. 358). Without control over the management of the funding for education, First Nations encounter a “serious impediment to devolution” (p. 361). As Hall (1992) stated, the federal government’s use of the term “band control” is misleading, as “real control has been retained by the federal department of Indian and Northern

Affairs, which controls all the finances" (p. 65). As long as legislative and legal authority continues to reside in non-Native legislative bodies, Native people's abilities to control their children's education will be severely restricted.

In retrospect, the education system was not working when it was under the control of the federal government, and it struggles to work under First Nation control. The blame has therefore shifted from the federal government directly to the First Nations. But according to Agbo (2002), unless the "federal authorities are ready to fully commit themselves to giving full jurisdiction over education by providing First Nations communities with both material resources, . . . schools for Native children are liable to remain unsuccessful and mediocre in quality" (p. 297).

As discussed previously, not all First Nation schools have access to the curricular and management supports to ensure that quality programming and research based instructional practices reach their students. According to Carr-Stewart (2006), this is due in large part to "the inappropriateness of the Indian Act as a vehicle to deliver educational services, and the lack of financial and governance support for First Nations" (p. 1005 - 1006) to be able to deliver effective programming. Carr-Stewart made note of what First Nations have always known: that there are two education systems operating in Canada, one for the provinces, and one for Native people residing on reserves. This two tier

system is entrenched in both the Constitution Act and the Indian Act, and although educational programming is similar, Carr-Stewart states that "educational policies and practices over the past century have fostered different levels of educational opportunities and educational attainment for students within the two systems" (p. 1001 – 1002).

The use of norm referenced standardized testing instruments to measure student achievement for First Nation students has always been controversial. The *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper of 1972 recommended the elimination of "I.Q. and standardised tests for Indian children," citing the shortcomings and cultural bias of such tests to accurately measure the intelligence of minority groups (p.10). However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, a study conducted by Philpott, Nesbit, Cahill, & Jeffery (2004), found that these instruments are still being used on First Nation students by both provincial and First Nation school boards.

The inappropriate use of standardized test scores, particularly to make educational decisions and recommendations for programming for First Nation students, is often cited in the literature as a major concern (Philpott, et al, 2004, p. 82; Neslon-Barber & Trumbull, 2007; Morris, Pae, Arrington, and Sevcik, 2006). The misuse of the standardised testing information may be more prevalent in First Nation communities, as Agbo's (2005) study found that those

occupying the positions of education director or education coordinator in First Nation schools had “neither the education nor experience to make informed decisions on such matters” (p. 34). This view is supported by Kirkness (1999), who noted that it was “our own peoples’ insecurity in taking control” due in part to “the difficulty to overcome colonial domination” (p. 32). On a First Nations school level, Wilson (2007) states that there is no system of accountability to ensure that “school is open for an adequate amount of time, that curriculum is being followed, that instructors are qualified, or that due process is being followed” (p. 250).

A recent review of the membership of the Chiefs of Ontario’s First Nations Education Coordination Unit (FNECU), a technical and advisory group for education issues in Ontario, found that of the eleven members, only four have an education background and of those only three have teaching qualifications (Chiefs of Ontario webpage, March 16, 2009). This tends to be an on-going problem, as the shortage of qualified First Nation school administrators forces many band councils and First Nation school boards to hire staff with little if any experience in educational settings. As noted by a C.D. Howe Institute report (Richards, Hove, and Afolabi, 2008), the “highest priority is to professionalize education by the creation of Aboriginal-run school authorities, independent of individual band councils” (p. 1). This view is reiterated by a 1998 study in British Columbia (Kavanagh, Postl, and Matthew, 1998) which stated that First Nation

education authorities should “operate independently of the band structure, as this will ensure their attention remains focused on education matters” (p. 51) to ensure that school interests and community politics do not compete.

3.3 Funding Levels and the Band Operated Funding Formula

The Assembly of First Nations (2005) cited sufficient resources as a key principle for education by the Department of Indian Affairs to “reflect the reality that the provision of quality education requires” (p. 3) for First Nation operated schools. The funding levels for First Nations education is not consistent with provincial funding levels, and the two percent cap imposed by the federal government on core funding since the 1996/97 fiscal year has not allowed First Nations to keep pace with increased costs to education, most notably with teacher salaries and textbooks. As Fulford (2007a) discovered in his case study of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, this amounted to 40% less funding just in special education costs when compared to the province of Ontario (p. 44). Further, Bell (2004) found that INAC is only funding approximately 75% of the educational costs when compared to provincial school systems.

In contrast, Fulford (2007b), in a companion analysis to his original study, found an average difference of 33% less when compared to the provincial /

territorial funded schools, although individual school funding varied considerably (p. 137). The reason for the variation was due to fluctuations in the annual nominal roll or school enrolment. For band councils with multi-year funding agreements, changes in enrolment do not equate to changes in funding levels, as the amount of funding is locked in over the term of the agreement. Generally band councils sign agreements for five years, so changes in enrolment, either up or down, do not change the funding levels. In the case of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, declining enrolment over the past ten years has given the Board some flexibility in how the funds are spent. Lower enrolment has actually been beneficial for the Board, as more money per pupil can be allocated. However, if enrolment were to increase, funding levels would not and would therefore result in a lower per pupil allocation.

Vanevery-Albert (2005), in a report to the Chiefs of Ontario, found that First Nation schools receive only 60% when compared to the Ontario provincial average. The formula that INAC continues to use was developed in 1988, where the base rate per student supports numerous services, including "teacher salaries, books and supplies, instructional materials and core curriculum requirements" (p. 3). The 2003/04 per pupil amount was $4,127.00, which by adding the annual two percent to the 2007/08 school year amounted to approximately $4,457.00 per student. Adjustment factors to the base formula

include a separate amount for isolation and remoteness. High cost special education is funded separately using a formula based on the nominal roll. The higher the nominal roll, the higher the amount allocated for special education services.

Fulford (2007b) also addressed the issue of economies of scale in his follow up report. In the area of testing, particularly by First Nation schools who participate in provincial assessments, the schools must take into consideration the costs associated with doing so. He posited that due to this financial cost, many First Nation schools do not participate and therefore miss out on the information that such testing can bring to improve student achievement (p. 139).

The disparity in funding between INAC and provincial schools causes many First Nations to choose between essential services for daily operation and those programs and assessments that could improve student achievement and instructional practices. For those First Nation schools that do participate in either local standardised testing or provincial assessments, the release of the results either to the public or to INAC is closely guarded. Due to the fear of sharing data, the assessments may have limited ability to improve either student achievement or instructional practices.

First Nation schools located on-reserves do not fall under the mandate of provincial ministries of education, and therefore are not required to administer

provincial examinations. Philpott, Nesbit, Cahill, & Jeffery (2004) surveyed First Nation band administered schools across Canada, representing a First Nation school population of approximately 13,000 students. The study sought to "identify various assessment instruments – including both quantitative and qualitative" (p. 90) that were being used in the schools. The study found that overwhelmingly First Nation schools were using norm referenced quantitative assessments, including Weschler and the Woodcock Johnson to measure intellectual ability, as well as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and the Canadian Achievement Tests (CAT) to measure academic achievement. The study did find that there was evidence of a blending of both quantitative and qualitative assessment use, including the use of criterion referenced tests and curriculum based assessment, generally those found within packaged curriculum. The study also found that only 28.8% of the reporting schools had developed a policy on assessment use within their school board, and only 25.8% had developed a policy on inclusive education (p. 93).

While Philpott, et al (2004) found that most First Nation schools administered some form of standardised assessment, regional INAC offices rarely receives the results (K. Knott, personal communication, August 20, 2008). The sharing of the data is controversial and closely guarded, because according to one Education Coordinator in Northern Ontario, there is fear that "Indian

Affairs will use it against us" (D. Frenette, personal communication, October 27, 2008).

Finding similar results on the use of standardised assessments, a 2007/08 study by the First Nations School Association in British Columbia found that 39% of the schools reported using either the CAT or CTBS assessments for reading achievement, while 36% used the same assessments in mathematics.

The results of the Philpott, et al (2004) study appear to accurately represent the assessment environment in First Nation schools across Ontario. Of the 134 First Nation communities in Ontario, 94 operate on-reserve schools or various education learning centres, including alternative education centres and internet high schools on remote reserves. Of those 94 schools, six are federal schools operated by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, five of which are on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory (Ohsweken, Ontario) and one is on the Tyendinaga Mohawk territory (on the Bay of Quinte, Ontario). The federally operated schools use the Ontario provincial testing and assessments, although the Ontario Regional Office of the Department of Indian Affairs reports that approximately six First Nation schools also use the provincial examinations (K. Hill, personal communication, November 25, 2008).

The Ontario Ministry of Education requires that students in Grade 3, 6, 9, and 10 take year end assessments, but First Nation schools make the

determination whether they will participate. The province-wide assessments were initiated under the Mike Harris government in 1996 as part of his "Common Sense Revolution" platform. Unlike their provincial counterparts, those First Nation schools that do participate must pay for their students to take the assessments, which ranges between $55.00 and $85.00 per student.

In 2007, The Ontario Ministry of Education released the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* to address the achievement gaps for aboriginal students within the provincial school system. To accompany the document, the Ministry committed 27 million dollars the first year and established an Aboriginal Education Office. Education Officers were hired and were placed around the province to act as a liaison between the Ministry and provincial school boards. The framework's goals are to improve academic achievement among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, to increase the retention of First Nation students in school, to improve the graduation rates of First Nation students, and to promote the advancement of First Nation students to postsecondary studies (Ontario, 2007b).

The framework includes specific strategies that "are based on a holistic and integrated approach to improving Aboriginal student outcomes" (p. 6). Four principles are identified in the framework: excellence and accountability, equity

and respect for diversity, inclusiveness, cooperation and shared responsibility, and respect for constitutional and treaty rights. The Ministry has identified performance measures "to gauge the success of the implementation of the framework" (p. 10) and includes the collection of data on Aboriginal students.

To address the collection of data on Aboriginal students, a second document was released in 2007 titled *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students*. The document outlines a process for Aboriginal students in the province to voluntarily self identify in order for the Ministry to begin collecting data and monitoring their academic achievement. Data collection includes the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in provincial schools, and their academic achievement on the provincial assessments, which are administered in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10.

The policy is not without its detractors. Cherubini and Hodson (2008) expressed their fear that the policy was "grossly exploitative to the identity of Aboriginal learners to have the reporting of their test scores segregated from the same mainstream learners with whom they share a publicly-funded education" (p. 17). As well, First Nations are again worried that the data collected will be used against them by not only INAC, but by the Ministry of Education.
The access to, use of, and distribution of the data collected on Aboriginal students is a major concern for First Nation communities. The First Nations

Centre (2007) released a report titled *OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession* that addressed the collection and use of data and information garnered within First Nation Communities. The report "offers a way for First Nations to make decisions regarding what research will be done, for what purpose information or data will be used, where the information will be physically stored and who will have access" (p. 1).

These four guiding principles form the acronym for the OCAP policy. Ownership "refers to the relationship of a First Nations community to its cultural knowledge/data/information" and states that ownership is a collective right of the community (p. 4). Control "asserts that First Nations Peoples, their communities and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking to control all aspects of research and information management processes which impact them" (pp. 4 – 5). This control begins at the inception of the idea for the research and follows through to the management of the data. Access "refers to the right of First Nations communities and organisations to manage and make decisions regarding access to their collective information" (p. 5) through standardised, formal protocols developed at a community level. Lastly, possession of the data "is a mechanism by which ownership can be asserted and protected" (p. 5) and can protect the First Nation community from outside agencies misusing the data. Although the policy was initially developed to address concerns regarding health

research that was occurring in First Nation communities, other programs and departments have begun to embrace the policy and are applying the principles to all research conducted in their communities.

At a meeting of the First Nations Education Coordination Unit on October 27, 2008, at the offices of the Ontario Ministry of Education in Toronto, which the researcher attended as a member of the Coordination Unit, the key concern discussed was over the self identification policies and the control and use of the data that were being collected. In attendance were two First Nations education coordinators that had self-identification policies in place with ten separate provincial school boards, representing over 50 First Nation communities in Ontario. The education coordinators expressed their concern that the First Nations were not being consulted before the data was being released to the public, and that the policies that were developed lacked a mechanism for the First Nation communities to be consulted. The Ministry officials of the Aboriginal Education Office recommended that the First Nations approach the provincial schools boards and possibly amend the Self Identification Policies. To date, this has not happened.

In British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005 & 2007), the collection of data and testing results has been in place for over a decade. However, it should be noted here that information on Aboriginal students and

their families occurs only for provincially funded schools and not for band operated schools. In annual reports, data is presented on student achievement on the provincial assessments, residency status on-reserve or off-reserve for students, achievement by gender, and placement in special education programs, attendance, graduation, and school completion rates, among others.

Change on a national level has been variously proposed. The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) in 2004 declared the education of Aboriginal people a priority in Canada (2008). This acknowledgement led to the development of an Aboriginal Education Action Plan. The plan has four long term goals that seek to create positive learning experiences of Aboriginal students, improve student well-being, increase student success, and improve the labour marketability for Aboriginal students (p. 2). These goals come with specific objectives and include increased graduation rates, increased post-secondary attendance, increased Aboriginal teachers in the K to 12 system, and increased labour market participation (p. 3).

As part of this strategy, CMEC initiated a review of Aboriginal self-identification policies with the Educational Policy Institute (2008) in an attempt to understand how the provinces were collecting and analysing data on Aboriginal students. The Council noted that “existing service delivery systems based on self-identification also demand improved self-identification practices to ensure

expanded delivery" (p. 1). The aim of the study was to "provide examples of effective practice and lay a foundation for policy recommendations for the future development of self-identification policies and pan-Canadian data collection" (p. 6). The study found a great variance in the practices of data collection and determined that the provinces collected the data primarily for "funding purposes" and for "tuition reimbursements at the K -12 level and for special scholarships at the post-secondary level" (p. 8).

Legislative change has been proposed through the creation of a First Nations Education Act. McCue (2003) proposed an overhaul that would create a national system in both infrastructure and curricula. He recommended reform with federal legislation that would remove education from the Indian Act and replace it with an Indian Education Act that would be "empowered to take responsibility for Indian education at all levels" (p. 1). Wilson (2007) believes that the creation of a First Nation Education Act by First Nations themselves would "assert self-governance in practice" and would "ensure that future generations of First Nations youth receive the education they deserve" (p. 255).

Mendelson (2008) also proposed the creation of a First Nations Education Authority Act that would "establish tertiary services and the framework for secondary services" (p. 15). He called for the removal of the education sections in the Indian Act and the formation of a Community Education Authority. The

primary function of the Act would be to provide the needed and necessary second level services that are now absent in the current First Nations education system. The Act would also clearly state the principle of federal funding for education that would be consistent with provincial levels and bring some parity to First Nation schools.

3.4 Summary

The challenges faced by First Nations schools include the funding formula developed by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, which make both transferability and comparability difficult. Further, the federal government has tended to overlook the economic, health, social, and historical barriers to learning that many Aboriginal communities experience. With an emphasis on only high school graduation rates and post secondary participation, the federal government has failed to recognise the experiential and holistic lifelong learning approach found in traditional Aboriginal cultures. This partial view of Aboriginal learning does not "support effective policy development" (Cappon, 2008, p. 61) that would allow First Nation schools and communities to move forward in a positive and productive manner.

There is little if any real external pressure on First Nations by the federal government to make educational improvements for their students in on-reserve schools (Richards, 2008). There are also no mechanisms in place nor are there any benchmarks or standards that INAC uses to ensure that First Nations students achieve educational outcomes comparable to their provincial counterparts. The only requirements put in place are in the area of financial reporting, and these are rather general reports due at the end of each fiscal year. Indeed, most First Nations would balk at the interference of INAC if they started requiring detailed reports on student achievement, as most would see this in direct violation of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972).

This creates a difficult situation for both the federal government and for First Nations. The federal government has retained an arm's length relationship with First Nations in the area of education, acting only in their fiduciary duty. On the other hand, First Nations have struggled with developing capacity within their own communities to effectively and efficiently manage the operation of their schools without the supports found in the provincial school system. To address this, Mendelson (2008; 2009) proposes a First Nations Education Act, which would provide First Nations school systems with the secondary services needed

to operate more effectively and to ensure some level of accountability for student achievement.

CHAPTER 4

School Reform on a First Nations Level

4.0 Introduction

School reform at the First Nations level in Canada has come to the forefront of both academic and political discussions, particularly since the Conservative government under the leadership of Stephen Harper was elected in 2005. With the political agenda focused on accountability, particularly after the Auditor General's Report of 2004 (Fraser, 2004), which called for more stringent controls and transparency on the part of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the push has trickled down to all levels, most notably at the First Nations school level. Using census data from 1996 and 2001, the report calculated the education gap that exists under the current funding levels and estimated that "the time to close that gap and for First Nation people living on reserve to reach parity with the Canadian population as a whole . . . would take about 28 years" (p. 10).

In response to the 2004 Auditor General's Report, INAC developed an Education Action Plan, tabled with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in May of 2005 (P. Garrow, personal communication, May 29, 2006), and put forth a

commitment to develop a First Nations Education Policy Framework (EPF) in cooperation and consultation with First Nations. The principles set out for the development of the EPF are summarised below (Assembly of First Nations, 2005; Morgan, 2005):

1. Trust: provide a basis to facilitate a relationship between INAC and First Nations on open communication, mutual understanding, and the honour of the Crown;
2. Respect: fully respect Parliamentary Authority, Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, that affirms Aboriginal treaty rights, inherent rights, and human rights;
3. Diversity: the recognition that First Nations across Canada have diverse languages, cultures, socio-economic conditions, aspirations, and governance models;
4. Sustainability: resources for First Nations education will be sustainable so as to enable meeting expected outcomes;
5. Integration: the implementation of programs and policies will support an integrated approach that supports the lifelong learning of First Nation people;

6. Transparency: ease of access and sharing of information to support sound decision-making;
7. Reciprocal Accountability: a reciprocal relationship between INAC and First Nations that is based on the obligations to demonstrate, review, and take responsibility for performance, based on the five accountability principles of the Auditor General: clear roles and responsibilities, clear performance expectations, balanced expectations and capacities, credible reporting, and reasonable review and adjustment.

Regional dialogues were conducted during the late spring and summer of 2006, with a roll up of recommendations submitted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to INAC in September of 2006. The intention of the EPF was to provide a foundation for the development of First Nation education policies and programs over the next ten years and was anticipated to take effect at the beginning of the 2007/8 fiscal year. However, due to federal government bureaucracy and stalling, that has not yet happened.

4.0.1 The Caledon Institute of Social Policy Reports

In the 2006 *Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada* report by the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Michael Mendelson analysed 2001 Census data and found disturbing results for First Nations people in Canada: 43% of aboriginal youth aged 20 to 24 do not have a high school diploma, compared with the national average of 16% (p. 1). For on-reserve residents in this age category, the news is even dimmer: nearly 58% had not completed high school (p. 1). For First Nations people living off-reserves and attending schools in the provincial system, primarily in urban areas, the situation improves slightly, but at 35%, it is still double that of the Canadian population (p. 1).

Mendelson cited the residual effects of the residential school system, the two percent funding cap imposed by Indian and Northern Affairs in 1996, and the lack of secondary support services to First Nation school systems as some of the factors impacting this situation (p. 2). He also cited the fact that 72% of First Nations students attend school on-reserve, operated and managed by First Nations themselves. However, on a positive note, 75% of those aboriginal students that do graduate from high school attend some form of post-secondary program at the college or university level (p. 3).

Mendelson put the blame for this dismal situation squarely on the Indian Act (R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5) and the inability of the federal government to put forward a legal framework for First Nations to control and manage their educational school systems. The author proposed a First Nations Education Act to "clarify roles and responsibilities" and to "provide a new legal basis for federal support of First Nations education" (p. 4). This act would develop a "regulatory framework for both Ottawa and First Nations, including the statutory basis for educational funding" (p. 4), which would address the disparity in funding of more than one percent per year since 1996. His final call was for the consolidation of First Nations school boards and larger First Nations organisations to provide support services, similar to provincial ministries of education. The Cree and Inuit in Quebec, the Nisga'a in British Columbia, and the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia were cited as examples of the progress already under way (p. 5).

In 2008, Mendelson and the Caledon Institute released a follow-up report titled *Improving Education on Reserves: A First Nations Education Authority Act*. This time he used census data from 2006, and found that "the results are unchanged: approximately 60 percent of First Nations on-reserve aged 20 to 24 still have not completed high school" (p. 1). While conditions for First Nations students remained the same during this time period, improvements within the

general Canadian population improved, and therefore the gap between the two groups actually increased.

Due to the issue of accuracy surrounding the use of census data for First Nations in Canada, Mendelson analysed Department of Indian Affairs data and found that the graduation rate ranged from 29.0% to 35.5%, or an average of 31.6% for the time period from 1996 to 2003 (p. 1), clearly supporting his findings.

Mendelson again proposed a First Nations Education Authority Act to replace Sections 114 to 122 of the *Indian Act*, which deals specifically with the federal responsibility of education for on-reserve First Nations students in Canada. He described the *Indian Act* in terms of a federal policy vacuum, "which is stifling efforts to improve education for residents on reserve" (p. 3) "given that the federal government cannot itself provide substantive leadership in education" (p. 8).

The call for First Nations education reform did not only come from outside of First Nation communities, but from within as well. In the Manitoba Cree community of Opaskwayak, James Wilson of the local educational authority notes that there is a gray zone of jurisdiction over First Nations education. This gray zone "is generated by conflicting and overlapping areas of jurisdictional responsibility" that are "proclaimed by federal interpretations of treaties and laid

out in the *Indian Act*" (Wilson, 2007, p. 249). He called for a First Nations Education Act to address "the profound disparities between educational opportunities available to most Canadians and those available to First Nations people" (p. 248).

Wilson proposed a First Nations Education Act to assert Aboriginal authority over education, as an action of self-determination and self-governance, and most importantly, "to ensure that future generations of First Nations youth receive the education they deserve' (p. 255). The Act, however, should not be imposed or come from the outside, but rather from within First Nation communities if it is to succeed and meet the diverse needs of the Aboriginal communities.

4.1 First Nation Treaty Agreements

With the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, the *Nisga'a Final Agreement*, and the *Mi'kmaq Education Act* regularly cited as model agreements by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, a brief look at each, with close attention to the education component, will be examined here.

4.1.1 The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement

The *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* (JBNQA) of 1975 created the Cree School Board and the Kativik School Board, respectively, for the Cree and Inuit living in northern Quebec. In 1978, the Northeastern Quebec Agreement modified the original agreement by adding the Naskapi Nation into the mandate. The agreement was reached largely in response to the James Bay Hydro Project initiated by the Quebec government in 1971. The agreement was the first treaty negotiated and signed since the 1920's, and for that reason it is often cited as having historic significance, and one that would be used as the historical maker for an new era of treaty-making between aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government.

The language in the JBNQA, negotiated between 1973 and 1975, is indicative of the separatist charged atmosphere of the times. In the opening statement on the philosophy of the agreement, Premier Bourassa is referred to as the "Prime Minister of Quebec" (Government of Canada, 1975, p. 1), and the agreement as "the point of making history" (p. 1) for Quebec, with no mention of Canada, but rather to "the history of North America" (p. 1). Further, the agreement is not seen as one between two First Nations and the government, but rather one that "foresees the rational organisation of a territory of 410,000 square-miles" (p. 1) as the primary objective. This view appeared to be in

contradiction to the view held by the Cree and Inuit, who asserted their right to the land as “the original inhabitants of our territory, and have occupied our land and governed ourselves for the past 9000 years” (Grand Council of the Crees, 1995, in the Preface).

While the JBNQA sets forth that the James Bay Crees and Inuit “cede, release, surrender and convey all their Native claims, rights, titles and interests, whatever they may be, in and to land in the territory” (JBNQA, para. 2.1; LaRusic, 1979, p. 15), the Cree asserted that it was signed under duress. In support of this claim, Billy Diamond, former chief of Rupert House (present day Chisasibi) and Task Force Liaison Worker for the agreement, stated that the entire process was negotiated under the imminent threat of destruction of their territory, as the hydroelectric project was already under construction. Within this climate, he stated that “we saw the need to limit the damages, seek remedial works and have certain fundamental rights recognised” as “we really had no other choice” (Grand Council of the Crees, 1995, p. 252). In 1976, Joe Clark confirmed this assertion of duress, indicating that “the people of the James Bay region were negotiating under the gun of a deadline to which they had to adhere” (p. 253).

In the area of education, the time period of the JBNQA was marked by Trudeau’s White Paper of 1969, and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs’ desire to “divest itself of responsibility for the provision of community

services such as education, and see these taken over by the Province" (LaRusic, p. 18). These changes occurred with Bill 2: An Act to Amend the Education Act on June 8, 1978, required under Sections 16 and 17 of the JBNQA. The agreement set up the Cree School Board, follows the provincial model, includes nine commissioners, one from each community, and one from the Cree Regional Authority. The Authority maintains considerable administrative discretion over the province in hiring policies and in the area of curriculum and curriculum development.

The complexity of the JBNQA lies in its division of federal and provincial jurisdictions, and in its clarifying of aboriginal rights (LaRusic, p, 113). Before the JBNQA, the Cree and Inuit were individual, isolated communities with no unified political structure, and very unlike the political powerhouse that it is today. According to a study conducted by Indian Affairs in 1979, the JBNQA even created a Cree bureaucracy and a class differentiation (LaRusic, 1979) in the Cree communities.

4.1.2 Nisga'a Final Agreement

In British Columbia, the *Nisga'a Treaty*, signed into law by an Act of Parliament in 2000, provides for a comprehensive agreement unlike any treaty signed between the Crown and an aboriginal group in Canada. The final

agreement includes the ability of the Nisga'a to collect taxes from its people in the same manner as a municipality, in order to fund their on-going programs and services. The proportion of revenue raised within the Nisga'a territory is set to be phased in over a twelve year period, and most notable is that "the Indian Act will no longer apply to the Nisga'a (INAC, April 2000, p. 24.1). The exemption from taxation on Nisga'a lands will no longer apply, and the Nisga'a peoples "will be subject to taxation in the same way as other Canadians" (p. 24.1).

The differentiation of jurisdiction between the federal government and the province, as with the JBNQA, is retained in this treaty, and more striking is the extinguishment of aboriginal title to the land. Sections 2.22 and 2.23 address title to the land in an attempt to ensure that no further court action on behalf of the Nisga'a will occur (Rynard, 2000), even though Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982, recognised and affirmed aboriginal rights, including aboriginal title. Yet, there is similarity between the Nisga'a and the JBNQA in that each has their "land rights and ties to their land . . . frozen" (p. 221). As noted by Matthew Coon Come, "for aboriginal people, extinguishment is brutal conquest attempted with a fountain pen" (in LaRusic, 1979, p. 233).

Education for the Nisga'a in British Columbia is quite different in comparison with the Cree and Inuit in Quebec. While education structures in Quebec were predominantly under the control of Department of Indian and

Northern Affairs, who built, managed, and funded the school system, the Nisga'a schools were and still are provincially funded, and thus under the management of the province. Another important distinction between the two agreements is that Nisga'a lands are not covered under the Indian Act as reserve lands, and the major concession to signing the agreement was the loss of status for Indian tax exemptions.

4.1.3 Mi'kmaq Education Act

In Nova Scotia, the federal government passed the *Mi'kmaq Education Act* in 1998, and required as a stipulation of passage the establishment of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (McCarthy, 2001), an organisation of thirteen member communities (although only nine signed the original final agreement, with a tenth signing on in 2005), to promote, facilitate, and develop excellence in education. The organisation negotiated a five year $145 million dollar agreement to provide educational services for the member communities, including Mi'kmaq infused curriculum, in addition to the delivery of elementary and secondary education, and post secondary funding (INAC, 2005, para. 5).

This agreement is distinct from the JBNQA and the *Nisga'a Final Agreement* in that is addresses only the area of education, and thus is not a treaty. The *Mi'kmaw Education Act*, under Powers and Duties of Communities,

6. (1), states that “a community may, to the extent provided by the Agreement, make laws applicable on the reserve of the community in relation to primary, elementary and secondary education” and establishes the Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey “for the purpose of supporting the delivery of educational programs and services under this Act” (House of Commons of Canada, Bill C-30, 1997-98).

The *Mi’kmaq Education Act* is however, an aggregate agreement that includes multiple First Nation member communities entering into a federal and provincial education agreement for the purpose of providing education services. This aggregate model is the first of its kind entered into by Indian Affairs, and has since been touted as a model for other First Nation groups to follow. At a community level, there was a perceived need as “there had to be unity” and because “the communities couldn’t do it on their own” (Marion Paul, Eskasoni First Nation, in McCarthy, 2001, p. 5).

However, the 2004 Auditor General’s Report noted that the parties lack a common understanding of the meaning and the implications of First Nations jurisdiction over education, specifically in the areas of jurisdiction over education, including accessing federal funds and program dollars, and reporting mechanisms. The report noted that little had changed in terms of reporting to the Department of Indian Affairs since the agreement was signed, and concluded

that “the Department and participating First Nations need to review the agreement and its implementation and resolve disagreements” (Fraser, 2004).

4.2 A New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs in Ontario

In 2005, the Ontario government released a report entitled A New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs and developed a mission which stated that “prosperous and healthy Aboriginal communities create a better future for Aboriginal children and youth” (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, 2005, p. 2). The initiative included developing relationships with Ontario’s northern aboriginal communities, the Métis, and aboriginal women, and the establishment of clearer roles and responsibilities in keeping with the federal government’s special relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Also cited was the need to “work with the federal government to foster a more constructive and co-operative relationship on Aboriginal matters” (p. 5).

As part of this new approach, the Ontario government opened the Aboriginal Education Office within the Ministry of Education in January of 2006. In 2007, the Aboriginal Education Office released the *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. The policy document focuses on improving achievement and closing the gap in the areas of literacy and numeracy among

the province's more than 50,000 aboriginal students, representing approximately three percent of Ontario's elementary and secondary student population (Ontario, 2007b). The Ontario government also committed 23.2 million dollars to implement the initiative for the 2007/08 fiscal year, including the hiring of five aboriginal education officers to work as a liaison between the Ministry, the First Nations, and the provincial school boards (Ministry of Education, Memorandum, Nov. 27, 2007).

An aboriginal self-identification policy initiative was also instituted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2007, whereby provincial school boards would develop a policy and reporting mechanism for students to voluntarily self-identify as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis. The policy document is titled *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students: Developing Policies for Voluntary, Confidential Aboriginal Student Self-Identification: Successful Practices for Ontario School Boards*.

The policy was initiated due to the lack of data on First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students in the public school system that is being served outside of a First Nation tuition agreement. First Nations who send their children to schools off their home reserve enter into tuition agreements with the local provincial school board, paying a per pupil tuition fee, which may or may not include the cost of transportation. The local band council, education authority, or in some cases, the

Department of Indian Affairs, makes the payment to the provincial school board based on enrolment.

Tuition agreements have tended to be a controversial issue, as provincial schools boards have been accused of overcharging First Nations or not providing the services that the First Nation was billed for (Bigwin, 2002). For First Nation and Inuit students who are not resident on their home reserve, particularly in urban areas, and are therefore not covered by a First Nation tuition agreement, the local provincial school may not even be aware of their presence in the school system.

The goal of the self-identification policy is to ensure that First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students "receive the highest possible quality of education, and that all Ontario students benefit from an appreciation of the richness of Aboriginal cultures, and the important contributions of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities to Ontario's cultural, economic and social future" (Ontario, 2007b, p. 4). Provincial grants to school boards were made available for the development and implementation of the policy, although at this time only a handful of First Nation communities have completed the task.

4.3 Using Research-based School Reform Models on a First Nation Level

The use of school reform models, as implemented in the public school systems, either in the United States or Canada, must be carefully evaluated before being implemented in federally funded First Nation schools in Canada. There are numerous complex and historical issues when measuring success in First Nations schools and when making comparisons with their provincial counterparts. One of the primary determiners is the funding formula used by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, developed in 1988 and based then on the Ontario formula. The Band Operated Funding Formula, which is based on the previous year's student enrolment, has been capped at a two percent increase annually for over a decade and thus has not kept pace with the increasing costs associated with delivering educational services (Vanevery-Albert, 2005). This makes the determination of comparability and transferability to public provincial schools a difficult if not an impossible task.

Current methods of measurement and the indicators used for success in Aboriginal schools are standard Western expectations, such as achievement on standardised tests and provincial examinations, high school graduation rates, and post secondary participation and attainment rates. These measurement indicators do not take into account the myriad of issues and social challenges

that Aboriginal people face in their communities (Turner, 1999). These include high rates of unemployment, poverty, large numbers of students with special needs, substandard housing, and the ability to access appropriate health care (Cappon, 2008, p. 60). For isolated First Nation and Inuit communities, access to high school often requires them to leave their community and travel long distances to attend the nearest high school, a contributing factor to the low graduation rate.

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre of the Canadian Council on Learning has developed three draft holistic lifelong learning models for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The graphic models "convey the dynamic processes and relationships that characterise learning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities" (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p. 18). The model is built on the four aspects of individual learning: the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual, which are represented in the Medicine Wheel. The models are intended to be customised by each Aboriginal community to meet their diverse cultural and linguistic needs, and should measure lifelong learning, with a synthesis of Aboriginal and Western knowledge (p. 29).

The Holistic Lifelong Learning Model for First Nations may prove to be a useful framework for measuring learning progress in First Nation communities,

not just in years of schooling and academic achievement, but in learning from birth to adulthood.

The challenge for First Nation communities is both in the collection and management of data, and in the reporting of such to funding agencies, particularly to Indian and Northern Affairs and Health Canada. The collection of longitudinal data and the types of measures to collect will need to be clearly developed within and across the various departments and programs within individual First Nation governments.

4.4 Summary

Several major First Nation agreements, treaties, and education acts in the past thirty years have emerged as solutions to the achievement and funding gap present in First Nations education. Both the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and James B. Wilson of the Opaskwayak Educational Authority have proposed a federal First Nations Education Act as a necessary overhaul of the antiquated and paternalistic Indian Act. The *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, the *Nisga'a Final Agreement Act*, and the *Mi'kmaq Education Act* are examples of provincial attempts to address the student achievement and funding gaps found in First Nations education from birth to adulthood. With the development of

three holistic life learning models for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, the Canadian Council on Learning proposed a paradigm shift in measuring progress and success in Aboriginal communities.

As illustrated in this chapter, there are many issues facing First Nation communities in the operation and control of schools. Funding for First Nation operated schools is not comparable to their provincial counterparts, and therefore student achievement, retention and graduation rates, and services for special needs students hinder First Nation students' ability to live in the "just society." Calls for reform on a national level have been proposed, including the legislation of a First Nations Education Act. Questions arising from this discussion focused on a basic neglect in addressing issues related to fairly, accurately, and clearly assessing student achievement and performance of First Nations students and therefore require a shift in evaluation methods. There is a need to revise, adapt, and create new models, and according to Morris, et al, (2006), to consider "the myriad of factors that impact Native American student's achievement outcomes" (p. 88).

The challenges in First Nation education reform are found on many levels. A long history of governmental paternalistic policies that are enshrined in the Indian Act has created a two-tier education system in Canada based on citizenship, one for Canadians, and one for Aboriginal peoples. The politics of

education for First Nations people go well beyond what all other Canadians experience within their provinces, as the education of Aboriginal people is a federal responsibility, but is often mixed with provincial mandates. This becomes a jurisdictional quagmire with overlapping and confusing mandates, from funding, reporting, curriculum, teacher certification, transportation, and tuition agreements, to name just a few.

Solutions to these problems are long overdue, but working through the federal and provincial bureaucracies to ensure that First Nations youth receive an education that is both comparable and transferable to the provinces must be addressed. The Hotinoshonni (Iroquois) principle of the "seven generations" tells us to consider our actions and decisions not only for the present, but for what impact they will have on our descendents "seven generations" in the future. This principle aptly describes what is needed in First Nations education reform. Working within the parameters that the federal system cannot be changed, but with the understanding that the assessment practices must be aligned with the realities found within First Nations schools, an alternative evaluation model will be proposed. The model includes research-based best practices, participation in large scale assessments, and the development of locally based indicators for monitoring and recognising student achievement.

CHAPTER 5

Methodology

5.0 Introduction

Improving and then measuring the educational outcomes for First Nations students in Canada requires the development of local performance indicators in addition to the use of summative and norm referenced assessments. The conditions and context of First Nations communities is markedly different than those found in the general Canadian population where large scale assessments are norm referenced. The review of models used to evaluate educational reform movements and school improvement planning in the United States and Canada provides a framework and a starting point for First Nations to develop indicators that reflects the realities of the school environment found in on-reserve school systems.

Assessment instruments for First Nations students have come without input or referencing to First Nation communities. These instruments have been taken from the general market and have historically been used as a singular reference point to determine student achievement without the consideration of the local context of First Nation communities. The development of a new model

to assess the effectiveness of First Nations education systems can be seen as a response to the failure of the federal government to provide a mechanism for the assessment of First Nations students and the evaluation of First Nation schools since the acceptance of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy in 1973. In this chapter I outline the research process to demonstrate how the methodology has been organised. The narrative inquiry and quantitative and qualitative data collection required substantive analysis while considering the community dynamics.

The chapter is organised in the following manner:

- Research question and an outline of the research approach;
- Discussion of the research site;
- Rationale for the study, the role of the researcher, and the reliability of the data;
- Research methodology;
- Description of the data collection procedures:

    Critical Planning Area 1: Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery

    Critical Planning Area 2: School Environment

    Critical Planning Area 3: Parental and Community Engagement

- Student achievement and improvement plan indicators;
- Significance of the study and a summary of the chapter.

The features of this study are described in context to develop a meaningful model for assessing First Nations student achievements as part of the movement to improve the schools.

5.1 Research Question

The core question to be answered in this study was “Will the development and implementation of a comprehensive school improvement plan, following a research-based model and the development of locally based indicators, bring a First Nation school board to the provincial standard, as well as improve the perception of its schools as held by community members?”

Answering this question relied on a methodology that posits authority in the local knowledge of an on-reserve education system. Methods used in this study provide a foundation for the investigation into school improvement and assessment methods.

The model proposed in this study was developed from both quantitative and qualitative data collection in a mixed-methods approach and addressed the following:

1. the development of a board profile and three district school profiles;
2. the analysis of standardised testing results (Canadian Test of Basic Skills) for grade 4, 5, 7 and 8;
3. the development of a three-year comprehensive improvement plan, utilising the guidelines and format advocated by the Education Quality and Accountability Office and other documented research based school improvement agencies;
4. the analysis of three years of data collection of Ontario's EQAO testing in grade 3 and 6 (reading, writing, and mathematics) administered in 2007, 2008, and 2009;
5. the development and implementation of a professional development plan for teaching and administrative staff to effectively implement the plan;
6. the development of community-based performance indicators, including Native language, teacher and school principal certification rates, student perception of bullying, parental perceptions of the school system, student population census; and,

7. the assessment of the improvement plan using the performance indicators that were developed.

5.2 Research Site

The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE), located on the shores of the St. Lawrence River on the eastern edge of the Mohawk Nation territory, is within the federal jurisdictions of Canada and the United States, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the State of New York (see Appendix 1). The school district includes three buildings, structured by grade level, located in three geographically separate districts of the Mohawk territory, and provides an education range from Head Start to Grade 8. Two of the buildings are located in the province of Quebec, and the other is located in the province of Ontario. However, most of the five hundred students who attend these schools have to travel through New York State, with many crossing the international border and custom houses at Rooseveltown, New York and Cornwall Island, Ontario in order to physically get to their school.

In addition to the three schools operated by the AMBE, students in the community of Akwesasne have the choice and opportunity to attend two publicly operated school districts in the State of New York, the Salmon River Central

School District, the Massena Central School District. There is also an independently operated Mohawk language immersion school, the Akwesasne Freedom School. The Salmon River Central School District operates two sites, one elementary Pre-K to Grade 6 school building on the US portion of the reserve, and a Pre-K to Grade 12 campus located just off the reserve in nearby Ft. Covington, N.Y. The Massena Central School District operates four elementary schools, a junior high school, and a high school within close proximity to the Mohawk territory in Massena, N.Y. The Akwesasne Freedom School, a small private and independently operated school is located on the New York portion of Akwesasne, and provides instruction in the Mohawk language from Pre-K to Grade 6, with an English instruction program in Grades 7 and 8.

This unique geographic setting presents many jurisdictional and political problems, not only for the governments of Canada and the United States, who fund many of the institutions on the reserve, but for the residents of Akwesasne, who access these services. The school system in this study is funded through a multi-year funding arrangement (block funding) between the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), administered by the Indian Affairs Ontario Regional Office. The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, a nine member elected board of trustees, was formed by formal resolution in 1985, and began its first year as a school board in

1987 after the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne signed a devolution agreement with INAC.

It could be argued that the issue of confounders, such as parental school choice, may not play a part in this research site, as the unique geographic location allow parents to choose the school system that they perceive is better, much as is the case in the United States where school vouchers are used and have created competition for students. Parental choice in Akwesasne is a strong local issue, as the funding follows students, whether they attend school on-reserve, in Cornwall, Ontario, or at one of two school districts in New York State. In essence, the site provided the researcher with randomised experimentation, as parents had already made the choice to place their children in the school system, and all students stand to benefit from the district-wide improvement plan.

5.3 Rationale

The choice of Akwesasne as the subject of this study was both practical and relevant, as the district size and student population was one that could be easily documented and monitored. The school board, under a funding arrangement with INAC, through the 1987 devolution agreement, is required to follow the curriculum guidelines set by the Province of Ontario. However, there

has been no monitoring or assessment by any federal or provincial agency of the Board's progress in this area. Hence, the school board has basically been left to function with no intervention from either the federal government or with assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Education, since the province does not have jurisdiction or financial responsibility for any First Nation school authority.

It is also of importance to note that the community of Akwesasne is in close proximity to Cornwall, Ontario, a small city of roughly 46,000 residents. Therefore, Akwesasne residents have access to numerous services, professionals, health care, and shopping not found on many reserves in Canada. Akwesasne is neither remote nor isolated, and thus students have had access to books, educational resources, technology, and entertainment which are available on both sides of the U.S. and Canada border for many years. These factors, in addition to the fact that the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education has used standardised testing for over ten years, made the students of Akwesasne prepared to benefit from a comprehensive school-improvement plan.

This situation left the school board as a blank slate for research and analysis, and allowed for the implementation and assessment of the district-wide improvement plan. Without pressure or interference from outside federal or provincial education authorities, the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education was in a unique position to make improvements in both student performance and

community perception. As stated earlier, the model focused on one particular school system, however, the method used in this study may be useful to other First Nations education authorities.

5.3.1 Role of the Researcher

As the researcher and designer of this study, I built on and extended the initial research that I previously conducted to fulfill the monograph requirements of the Master of Education degree, which I began in 1994 and completed in 1999. The monograph, a qualitative study entitled *Local Control of Education: Expectations and Outcomes at Ahkwesahsne, A Case Study* (Montour, 2000), investigated the process that the First Nation community went through in their attempt to take control of their community's school system from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC). At the beginning of the inquiry, I was a teacher with the school board under study, but by the time the monograph was completed, I had moved to a neighbouring school board on the U.S. side of the reserve, although still a resident within the community, in the District of Tsi Snaihne, on the Quebec portion of Akwesasne.

As the new study began, I returned to the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, this time as the Director of Education. This position gave access to the school system being studied, and thus also came with the inherent biases or

compromises embedded in such an endeavour. As the plan was developed and implemented, the power issue, specifically the disproportionate balance of power between my position as Director of Education and that of the teaching, support, and administrative staff, may have impacted, either positively or negatively, the implementation and progress of the comprehensive improvement plan.

5.3.2 Reliability of Data

To ensure the reliability of the data collected, this study employed the following strategies:

Triangulation of data: data was collected and analyzed through multiple sources, including previously administered CTBS scores from 2003 onward, nominal roll (enrolment) numbers through INAC submitted reports, previously administered teacher and parent surveys, student bullying surveys, EQAO student scores as reported by the province, analysis of Board Meeting minutes during the period of study, interviews with principals, and observations within the three schools conducted during the period of study.

Member Checking: the Associate Director of Education, who has been with the school board since 1996, reviewed the analyses of documents, testing scores, surveys, and general narrative to ensure accuracy of reporting and interpretation. Additionally, Sharon Senior, Ed.D., the Inclusive Services

Program Facilitator, reviewed the draft for accuracy, particularly in the area of the special education program.

External Examiner: an external examiner, Dr. George Fulford of the University of Winnipeg, who conducted a review for the Board in 2006 as part of the Sharing Our Success series by the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, reviewed the narrative and analyses at the end of the study.

5.4 Methodology

Data were compiled, written, and analysed through utilizing the techniques of quantitative and qualitative data collection in a mixed methods approach (Mason, 2006; Frechtling & Sharp, 1997; Miller & Fredericks, 2006; Creswell, Trout, and Barbuto., 2003). This approach was chosen for the study because it provided a more comprehensive view of the school system, by using both quantitative data and narrative analysis, therefore increasing the ability of the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the improvement plan (Burke-Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, 2003). It is recognised that mixed methods as a research paradigm is both pragmatic and post-positivist (Giddings, 2006), and that the theoretical base for mixing methods is still developing.

However, the strength of a mixed methods approach is that it identifies a greater number of factors affecting effectiveness and achievement than could be found when using only a single research approach.

5.5 Data Collection and Procedures

The *EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning* identifies three critical areas that all school improvement plans need to address in order to be effective: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental and community engagement (EQAO, 2005, p.p. 15-17). Each of these three areas has been expanded with the initiatives, programs, procedures, and curriculum materials needed to develop and implement the school improvement plan on a board wide level within the three schools of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education. A fourth area of locally developed performance indicators was developed with the trustees of the Board and administrators within the Board of Education. These locally developed performance indicators were community based and included some indicators for the language and culture of the community of Akwesasne.

5.5.1 Critical Planning Area 1: Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery

Table 1: Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery Indicators

Curriculum	Programs
Guided Reading	*Inclusive Services Program*
Write Traits	*Early Years Program*
Saxon Math	*Mohawk Language Transition Program*
Professional Development	Student Achievement
Guided Reading Workshops	*CTBS*
Classroom Visitations	*EQAO*
Saxon Math Workshop	*Writing Prompts*
Establish Professional Learning-Communities	*Running Records*
	Report Card Data

Within the Province of Ontario for provincially funded schools, the Ministry of Education provides curriculum, curriculum resources, and the needed supports to implement the curriculum in the schools. This is not the case for First Nations schools. They are not part of the provincial system and must therefore download the curriculum documents from the Ministry website, or order them from the Ministry at a cost to the First Nation schools. The documents and the various Ministry initiatives do not come with the necessary supports to implement them effectively, and therefore First Nations students do not receive the full benefit of such initiatives. Further, it is often assumed by the Ministry of Education and

INAC that each First Nation school has full access to the curriculum and that they are able to use and implement them as is found in provincially funded schools.

The EQAO guide determines that curriculum delivery is a critical planning area. Since it could not be assumed that the Board of Education had the curriculum documents in place at the start of the study, the current school improvement plan included curriculum first, and then moved to the teaching practices found under the delivery of curriculum.

5.5.2 Ministry Initiatives: Early Reading Strategy K-3 (2004), Literacy for Learning 4-6 (2004), and Supporting Student Success in Literacy 7-12 (2004).

The English language arts program in Kindergarten through fourth grade employed the Guided Reading approach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2002; Duffy-Hester, 1999), a program based on literacy strategies developed by Clay (1979) and Cazden (1988) for the Reading Recovery program. Reading Recovery and the interventions or strategies used in guided reading have consistently shown significant growth in reading in the four primary literacy areas of word identification, writing vocabulary, sentence dictation, and text level comprehension (Iversen & Tunmer, 1993; Bruce, Snodgrass and Salzman, 1999).

The goal of guided reading is to "assist children in becoming independent and fluent readers by providing instruction in effective strategies (Smith, 2003, p. 1) through the use of levelled texts at the student's instructional level. Teachers maintain student progress using a format called running records, "which documents students' use of strategies for making meaning and utilizing visual, syntactic, and semantic cues (Bruce, Snodgrass, and Salzman, 1999, pp. 4). Themed and levelled texts provide for small flexible groupings, with instructional strategies targeted and focused on the specific individual needs of the student for a short duration, allowing students to move among the flexible groupings as their use of specific reading strategies improve.

Guided reading programs have been implemented at the St. Regis Mohawk School on the U.S. side of Akwesasne since 1999 as part of the district's comprehensive school reform plan. Additionally, the Upper Canada District School Board implemented guided reading strategies in the primary grades as part of the Ministry of Education's literacy initiative to meet their target to have 75 per cent of 12-year-olds reach the provincial standard on province wide reading, writing and math testing by 2008. By implementing a similar reading program, it was hoped that A.M.B.E. students would experience a smoother transition when transferring or moving among the school districts.

5.5.3 Ministry Initiatives: Early Math Strategy K-3 (2003), Teaching and Learning Mathematics 4-6 (2004), and Leading Math Success 7-12 (2004)

The implementation of the Saxon Math Program (Saxon Publishers, Inc., 1997; Harcourt Achieve, 2005; Thomson-Nelson Canada, 2006) was extended to include grades 5, 6, 7, and 8, completing a former initiative that began in 2001 beginning with Kindergarten and extending one grade level each succeeding year. Saxon Math, developed by John Saxon (1984) and Stephen Hake, uses an incremental development approach, with distributed practice, continual review of the increments, and frequent and systematic testing (Harcourt Achieve, 2005).

The approach used in the program has been developed on the spacing effect (Dempster, 1988), a research based approach developed on the finding that widely-spaced repetitions are more effective than narrowly-spaced repetitions, which produced significantly higher levels of student learning than massed presentations such as those found in programs with a chapter-based approach (Resendez & Manley, 2005). A significant amount of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of the program on increasing student achievement on standardised tests (Bosler & Gilman, 2003; Calvery, Bell, and Wheeler, 1993; Crawford & Raia, 1986) and the U.S. Department of Education is currently conducting a three-year evaluation of math curricula in early-elementary

education, including Saxon Math, to be conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., with a final report due out sometime in 2010.

Table 2: Professional Development to Support the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan

Initiative	*Professional Development Activities to Support the Initiative*
Literacy	1. Guided Reading Workshop Spring 2006 2. Bureau of Education Research (BER) Workshops Fall 2006 & Spring 2007 3. Classroom Visitations to St. Regis Mohawk School Spring 2006, Fall 2006 4. Attendance at on-going Reading and Guided Reading Workshops with the Upper Canada District School Board 5. Follow Up Visitations from Salmon River Central School's Literacy Coach Spring 2007, School Year 2007/08 6. A.M.B.E. Curriculum Specialist to provide on-going support 7. Appoint a lead teacher to develop and manage the Early Years Program (Head Start-K5) and act as facilitator 8. Minimum of 3 half-day Professional Dev. Workshops per school year
Numeracy	1. Saxon Math Introduction Workshop Spring 2006 2. Follow Up Meetings Fall 2006 3. A.M.B.E. Curriculum Specialist to provide on-going support 4. Minimum of 3 half-day Professional Dev. Workshops per school year

Inclusive Education & Services	1. Setting up of school Building Level Teams to provide school based services before referral to the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) 2. Appoint a lead teacher to develop and manage the Inclusive Services Program (ISP) and act as facilitator 3. Meet with staff at all three schools to introduce the program, Spring 2006 4. Visitations to schools with model inclusion programs 5. Minimum of 3 half-day Professional Dev. Workshops per school year

5.5.4 Ministry Initiative: Education for All (2005)

The model of inclusion for special education was derived from the Education of All Handicapped Children Act in the United States, enacted by President Gerald Ford in 1975, and re-authorised as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. In contrast to the practice of mainstreaming, inclusion programs are push in, where the special education teacher goes into the regular education classroom, rather than having the student pulled out for services. Seen as social justice by some (Artiles, Harris-Murri, and Rostenberg, 2006), as a school restructuring mechanism (Kerzner-Lipsky & Gartner, 1996), and ideological political posturing by others (Armstrong,

2006), the research into the effectiveness of the outcomes of inclusion is still being investigated (Idol, 2006; Stayton & McCullum, 2002), including parent perceptions of having their children educated in an inclusive setting (Leyser & Kirk, 2004).

To need to feel "included" is basic to the human nature, and it implies being a part of something, in essence being "embraced". In a school system, it is a set of beliefs and values, a philosophy of education that is the foundation and structure of the school. Inclusion builds the school as a community of learners, where everyone has a role and a voice, and where everyone matters. Inclusion is built on the following assumptions (Villa & Thousand, 1995):

- Each child can learn and be successful.
- Diversity enriches us all.
- Students at-risk can overcome that risk by involvement in a caring community of learners.
- Each child has unique contributions to offer.
- Each child has strengths and needs.

The inclusion model of instruction places the student with special needs in the least restrictive environment possible. It takes the idea of mainstreaming one step further by building in the necessary supports needed for students to be

successful in the mainstream class. The inclusion teacher is not a one-on-one aide or a tutor escort, rather the inclusion teacher takes an active role in all aspects of the classroom, from planning to small group teaching to classroom management. The inclusion teacher is integral, and students must view the inclusion teacher as "a teacher" in the classroom and within the school. When students see the inclusion teacher planning with the classroom teacher, grading, assisting in instruction, and taking an active role in all classroom activities, then the respect and "student to teacher" relationship will follow. To facilitate this process, each school has set up a Building Level Team to administer the program.

Organisation of the Building Level Team

Each school set up a Building Level Team. Each team consists of the following permanent members:

1. the Inclusive Services Program Facilitator, who acts as Chair
2. the school principal
3. all Special Education staff in the school are members of the team
4. the student's school counsellor, if applicable
5. teachers, by invitation or by choice, who have an interest and can share valuable expertise to the team

The following teachers become members of the team and attend the meetings as concerns for a particular student arise:

- the classroom teacher who identifies the student in question will sit on the team
- all grade level colleagues of the classroom teacher will sit on the team

Each school's staff is in the best position to identify, monitor, and implement a program suited to the needs of students requiring services additional to those in the general education program. As well, the expertise of teachers in the building needs to be utilized to the fullest, so that each student has access to any programs, methods, or services that can meet their particular needs. The area of special education is constantly changing and evolving, and current teachers are the best resources to have access or knowledge to new programs, philosophies, research, or methods.

Sometimes, a change in program, a change in delivery of instruction, a change of location for the student, or access to new methodologies can greatly enhance and improve the academic and social success of a student. Special services are no longer the realm of just the special education teacher, rather the majority of services can be provided for students within their regular classroom setting. Within this context, teachers who feel that a student may require a

program outside of the realm of the general program and beyond the expertise of their classroom can refer a student to the Building Level Team.

What the Building Level Team Does

The team provides support, upon request, to classroom teachers working with students who are experiencing behavioural, emotional, social, or educational / academic difficulties.

Types of assistance may involve:

- crisis intervention
- collegial advice or assistance in classroom management or instructional strategies
- referral to outside agencies for additional support, screenings, or evaluations
- referral for evaluation by the school psychometrist or psychological associate

Examples of Assistance from the Building Level Team:

- accommodation: allows students to complete the same assignment, project, or test, but with a change in timing, format, setting, response, or presentation

- modification: an adjustment to an assignment, project, or test that changes the standard or level of measurement
- behavioural contract: set up with the student that defines which behaviours are acceptable and those that are unacceptable, and what the consequences are (or further actions that may be taken) if change in student behaviour does not occur. This is completed in conjunction with other strategies or modifications.

Procedures

The team meets on an "as-needed" basis:

1. The classroom teacher makes a verbal request to the school principal or to the Inclusive Services Program Facilitator.
2. The school principal and the Facilitator schedules an initial team meeting in a reasonable amount of time after the referral is made (no more than 15 school days should elapse).

At the meeting:

The meeting convenes with the Inclusive Services Program Facilitator discussing the role of the Building Level Team meeting. The following points should be discussed:

- The Building Level Team is an advisory team.
- The team is problem-solving in design, set up to assist the teacher in helping the student achieve success in the classroom.
- The emphasis is to meet the student's needs first and produce positive learning outcomes.
- The team will describe and analyse the teacher's concerns about the student.
- The team will identify and suggest potential strategies to address the concerns.
- The team does not automatically make referrals for testing, rather it is pre-referral in nature.

The classroom teacher describes the academic and /or behaviour problems to the team, noting both strengths and weaknesses, and provides documentation, i.e., tests, or anecdotal reports to support the concerns. Areas such as vision, hearing, health history, attendance, and other interventions that may have been attempted in the past should be reviewed (or referral for these screenings).

The Building Level Team members ask questions, discuss similar situations (or their experience with the particular student and/or siblings), and clarifies the situation to pinpoint what the needs are:

- define the problem: break down a general concern and identify the specifics (i.e.: phonemic awareness, fluency, poor comprehension, procedural math errors, etc.)

- develop an assessment, if necessary: use classroom observations, general assessments (those available to the classroom teacher), informal reading inventory, guided reading, etc.)

- analyze the assessment results: compare to grade level equivalents, general expectations, or the classroom norm

An Intervention Plan with specific goals and objectives is created for the student. Specific intervention strategies are selected for the student based on the strengths and problems identified. A timeline is determined for the length of the plan before it is evaluated and another meeting is needed.

After the Meeting

1. The teacher puts the assessment plan (as determined above) or the Intervention Plan into place, seeking assistance from the Building Level Team as needed.
2. The teacher monitors and documents the progress of the student over the determined length of time. Recommended length of time for the implementation of the Intervention Plan is three (3) weeks.
3. If the student is successful with the Intervention Plan in the classroom, then the plan is continued.
4. If the student is not working toward meeting the goals in the Intervention Plan, the Building Level Team and the referring teacher can reconvene to change, modify, or design a different Intervention Plan.
5. If the student's needs cannot be met in the classroom with the interventions, then more formal documentation of the student's learning and behaviour performance will be needed to make a referral for an evaluation.
6. At this point, a formal referral for testing and/or evaluation can be made: assessments and documentation for a change in classroom placement (behavioural programs);
    - testing for disabilities or special needs;

- testing for additional academic services;
- referrals for counselling;
- recommendations to other community agencies;
- no detectable disability, but still in need of support services.

5.5.5 Early Years Program

The Aboriginal Head Start Program was established in 1995 through Health Canada. The primary focus was to enhance school readiness for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children living in urban and large northern communities. In 1998, the program expanded its mandate to include First Nation communities and to establish sites for on-reserve children. The program is centered on six components: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental involvement.

The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education opened a site in the community in 1999 with two half day sessions. Demand for student placements in the program was high, necessitating an expansion to three separate Head Start sites in each district school by the fall of 2005. Enrolment increased from thirty two students to forty eight students, with each site housing sixteen

students. Staff members were reassigned so that each site employed two Early Years educators.

In 2006, the position of Early Years Facilitator was created. The Facilitator was tasked with organising a uniform curriculum based on the components of the Head Start Program and the Ontario Kindergarten curriculum. In addition to providing professional development activities for the Early Years educators, the Facilitator makes recommendations to the Inclusive Services Facilitator for the early identification of learning or behaviour needs of students in the Early Years Program.

5.5.6 Grade 5/6 Mohawk Language Transition Program

The Mohawk Language Transition Program was implemented at the start of the 2007/08 school year to assist the students coming from the Tsi Snaihne School who were in the Skahwatsi:ra Program. These students had been in a full Mohawk language immersion program since K4 and had not formally received instruction in English.

The Transition Program is a split Grade 5/6 classroom with two teachers. Class size is generally under 20 students, with a teacher-pupil ratio under 1 : 10. The students are grouped according to reading ability, and the primary focus is on reading, writing, and mathematics. The students also received advanced

instruction in the Mohawk language as part of a language maintenance program to ensure that the students retain the language.

5.5.7 Student Achievement and Improvement Plan Indicators

Table 3: Quantitative Variables under Examination

Variable	PRE	MID	POST	Instrument
Student Achievement	Spring 2007	Spring 2008	Spring 2009	Canadian Test of Basic Skills in Grades 4, 5, 7, & 8
Student Achievement	Spring 2007	Spring 2008	Spring 2009	EQAO provincial assessments in Grades 3 & 6
Student Achievement of Mohawk Language Immersion Students			Spring 2009	Canadian Test of Basic Skills in Grade 6

Historical data generated from the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), using grade equivalents, and baseline performance from the first administration of the EQAO standardized test results for grades 3 and 6 was reviewed, and then monitored for the subsequent two administrations. Further data on student performance on the CTBS examinations at the grade 4, 5, 7 and 8 level was

monitored and analysed for improvement. To accompany the standardised testing data, which was summative in nature, student achievement, which is formative, was collected and reviewed. The collection of this data was through student report cards, and writing samples graded on a rubric.

Student achievement on the Ontario provincial Education Quality Accountability Office's (EQAO) standardised testing was compared to provincial benchmarks for students in grades three and six. The Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) for students in grade four, grade five, grade seven, and grade eight was monitored for growth and improvement. These two primary indicators were used to assess the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education's district-wide improvement plan, and after analysis, showed the Board's performance in relation to average provincial school boards, and to achievement growth using both the grade equivalents (GE) and the national percentile ranks (NPR) from CTBS.

5.5.8 Critical Planning Area 2: School Environment

Table 4: School Environment Indicators

Initiatives and Programs	Data Management
Board Motto Statement	*Attendance Rate*
School Mission Statements	*Special Education Rate*
Breakfast Program	*Teacher-Pupil Ratios*
School Leadership Teams	*Teacher Certification Rate*
Principals' Meetings	*Nominal Roll*
Boys and Girls Club	*Report Card Data*
Book of the Month	*Literacy Achievement*
Inclusion Model	*Numeracy Achievement*
Early Years Program	*Total Teaching Days*
Skahwatsi:ra Program	

The second critical area for school improvement is the school environment. It required the Board of Education and each individual school to review their vision and purpose and to develop a mission statement. Shared decision-making processes were also developed that included the creation of school Leadership Teams to provide each school with a shared-decision making process.

The school environment must cultivate a culture for improvement by developing a learning community (National Study for School Evaluation, 2004, p. 4) that fosters continuous growth. To create this environment, each school must have a shared vision and "goals that have student learning as the focus" (p. 13), and "specify measurable changes to the current teaching and learning

environment that will be necessary to foster increased learning (EQAO, 2005, p. 15).

To enhance shared decision making processes, through sharing the leadership role, each school established a school based committee called a School Leadership Team (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2003, p. 5), at the start of each school year. This helped to guide and "lead" the direction that the school would take over the course of the year to develop the school as a tight knit "home" community. The School Leadership Team worked toward making the school year a successful and enjoyable one for all of the students and staff. The Team identified glitches in the school system and made the necessary changes so that the system worked smoothly and to everyone's advantage. The Team is comprised of the school principal, who acts as the Chair, one representative from each grade level, the physical education teacher, one representative from the Special Education staff, one representative from the Mohawk Language department, and additional members as needed.

Through the school Leadership Teams, each school developed a new mission statement during the second half of the 2005/06 school year, with an emphasis on how their school fits into the larger district to meet the unique needs of their student population. The new mission statements were displayed

prominently in the foyer of each school, and on the tag line of each school principal's e-mail.

To promote the continuous growth of administrators, and to put into practice the principal as instructional leader (Zepeda, 2003), bi-monthly Principals' Meetings were held and organised to include professional development (Maloy, 1998, pp. 12-13; Whittaker, Whittaker, and Lumpa, 2000, p. 158; Elmore & Burney, pp. 2-3), and inter-visitations (Brady, 1993). The visits that principals make between schools have proven "to be a highly effective means of observing, discussing, and learning from exemplary practices" (Maloy, 1998, p. 12). Important peer relationships can arise from these inter-visitations, and serve as both structured and informal networks for the exchange of advice, new practices, and problem-solving (p. 13). See Table 5.

Table 5: Principals' Meeting Schedule

Bi-Monthly Principals' Meetings	
Date	**Agenda Items**
First Monday of the Month *A.M.B.E. Boardroom*	- administrative issues - policy review / updates - review of monthly school calendars and activities - review / develop curriculum initiatives - student achievement data analysis - goal setting - items as needed
Third Tuesday of the Month *(hosted at one of the schools)*	Professional Development: - book discussion (leadership, administration, etc.) - on-line course (leadership, emergency planning, etc.) *Inter-visitation* - host principal leads tour of their school *Luncheon* - principals meet privately

To promote a positive climate in the school, funding was secured from the National Child Benefit Reinvestment Fund and a free breakfast program for all students was started in March of 2006. The positive benefits of breakfast and lunch programs and the correlations to academic achievement in schools are well documented, and it was anticipated that the A.M.B.E. would see these benefits as well. The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education is committed to

providing balanced and nutritious breakfasts and lunches to our students in order to promote learning, positive behaviours, and healthy lifestyles. Research into school breakfast programs and academic achievement (Kleinman, Hall, Green, Korzec-Ramirez, Patton, Pagano, and Murphy, 2002; Florence, Asbridge, and Veugelers, 2008; Murphy & Pegano, 2001) have documented the negative effects of hunger on children's academic performance and behavior in school and determined that:

- Hungry children have lower math scores and are more likely to have to repeat a grade.
- Behavioral, emotional and academic problems are more prevalent among hungry children.
- Hungry children are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy.
- Children who skip breakfast are less able to distinguish among similar images, show increased errors, and have slower memory recall.

An agreement was made with the Akwesasne Boys and Girls Club to pilot a satellite program at the Kana:takon School, the early-intermediate school centrally located in the heart of the reserve. The club utilised the school gymnasium, computer lab, library, and multi-purpose room to students and community youth after hours. With funding from the Mohawk Council of

Akwesasne, the club site operated from 2006 to the summer of 2009. During the 2008-09 school year, an after-school latch key program offered after-school activities and supervision from 2:30 pm to 5:00 pm each day. This program allowed working parents the opportunity to have their children supervised until they could pick them up after work, and also benefitted the students by providing homework and mentoring each evening. Due to funding constraints and a change in the leadership of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne following an election in the summer of 2009, funding for the program was not secured to continue the program.

5.5.9 Critical Planning Area 3: Parental Engagement and Involvement

Table 6: Parental and Community Engagement Indicators

Unified Parent Committee	*School Census*
Safe Schools Policy Committee	*Parent Questionnaire*
Parental Involvement and Engagement Committee of the Board	

To engage parents in the improvement process and build a sense of community involvement, a unified parent committee was formed, based on the model of a school council under the Education Act in Ontario (Reg. 612/00). Previously, the Board had three individual school based committees. After

restructuring of the school system in 2001, the need for three separate parent committees was not deemed necessary or conducive to building a sense of community with parents.

A “Safe Schools Committee” was created to develop the policy and procedures that was adopted by the Board of Education in 2007 and was implemented in all A.M.B.E. schools. The purpose of this policy was to outline the protocol and state the procedures between the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE) and the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Services (AMPS) which would ensure that the schools were safe and welcoming places for teaching and learning. The policy is based on the traditional Hotinoshonni (Iroquois) principles of sken:nen (peace), ka’satstensera (power), and kanikonriio (the good mind).

To assist parents, the Parenting with Dignity course offered locally by the Akwesasne Economic Development Agency was offered to parents in 2006, and a Parent Resource Centre was opened in the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School for parents of students in the Early Years Program.

The Board of Education created a Parental Involvement and Engagement Sub-Committee to work with the Unified School Committee to provide resources, programs, and activities to encourage parental involvement in the three schools. Board members, on occasion, attended meetings of the Unified School

Committee, assisted with planning, and then made reports to the Board of Education at their regularly scheduled meetings.

For the 2007/08 school year, an electronic grade-book system was piloted. The electronic grade-book is web based and allows parents and students to access grades during the school year on an on-going basis, rather than at the end of the term. Additionally, teachers are able to set up a classroom web page with notes and messages to parents, with each teacher assigned an e-mail address in order to increase parental contact. The program was scheduled to be fully implemented for the 2009/10 school year, but due to pockets of resistance by some staff (due to the fear of technology), full participation and implementation has not been attained.

To assess the perception that parents have of the quality and performance of the school district, data previously collected from a local school census, which included questions on parental perceptions using a Likert Scale, of the four surrounding school districts, AMBE, Salmon River Central SD, Massena Central SD, and the Akwesasne Freedom School, were analysed and discussed. This analysis provided background information in regards to the issue of school choice in the community.

Between February and March of 2006, surveys were distributed to parents and community members (which include extended family members who have

custodial rights of students) during Open Houses held at each school, and one evening during the annual AMBE Community Night, where the community was invited for a spaghetti dinner and to meet with AMBE personnel to discuss the various programs available within the school board. Further, surveys were sent home with each student, and some were followed up with phone calls. Data were then compiled and organised. This previously collected data was analysed and commented on and served as a baseline for parent perceptions, offering both quantifiable information and qualitative insight.

Table 7: Akwesasne Performance Indicators

Skahwatsi:ra Program	*Teacher Questionnaire*
Kanien'kéha - Mohawk Language	*School Facilities*
School Profiles	*Teacher Retention*
Board Profile	*Principal Retention*
Bullying Survey	*Teacher Certification*
Board of Education (capacity development)	

At the start of the 2005/06 school year, the Mohawk Language Immersion Program was reorganised. The previous program was a K4 to Grade 6 configuration, but by the start of the 2005/06 school year, enrolment had dropped off considerably and there were no students in Grade 5 and only 2 students in

Grade 6. The program was reconfigured for K4 to Grade 4, and the program's focus shifted from literacy to oral fluency. The Mohawk Language Immersion Program became the Skahwatsi:ra Program, denoting the close relationship between language and the family (the name translates literally to "one family, one home"). Rubric assessments for fluency, comprehension, and participation were also introduced. In 2007/08, a Mohawk Language Transition Program was implemented to assist the students as they transitioned from the Mohawk language to the English program. The students were exempted from both the CTBS and the EQAO assessments until the spring of 2009, when the Grade 6 students took the CTBS assessment for the first time. The results are presented in Chapter 6.

A survey on bullying administered by the school district for students in grades 3 to 8 was given in the springs of 2006 and 2009. The survey results were analysed and presented as part of the background information, giving the research study an insight into how students feel about the school system in relation to their safety and comfort level while attending school. This analysis provided insight and valuable information about the school system and students perception of their place within their respective school within the time parameters of the study.

5.5.10 Demographic Data Collection

School information data were compiled and presented to develop general board-wide and then individual school profiles. Basic demographic information, such as socio-economic status (using free and reduced lunch applications, which are based on annual family income), special education identification and services (using Individual Education Plans found in the students Official School Records), attendance rates, teacher certification or qualification, years of experience levels, enrolment of students in Mohawk immersion programs, and Mohawk as a first language were also collected.

Table 8: Longitudinal Data Collection

Category	Variables
Student Background	*Gender* *SES (based on free/reduced lunch)* *Special Education Identification*
Teacher Background	*Average years of teaching experience* *Qualified / Certified*
Attendance	*Attendance Rate*
First Nations Staff	*Staffing Rate*
Instruction	*Teacher / Pupil Ratio* *Number of Instructional Days per year182 to 188 days)*

5.5.11 Observation and Interviews

The process of developing and implementing a district-wide improvement plan yielded much anecdotal and ethnographic data, as the focus of the plan was to improve both student academic achievement and community perception or reputation, which entailed primarily the human affective domain. The entire endeavour was basically humanistic, and involved a great deal of change and emotional resistance to such change. The process of change, as described by Kubler-Ross (1997), and others, was closely monitored in relation to the many systemic changes that occurred during the study, and was used to keep the study grounded and relevant to the people involved in the process.

Table 9: Qualitative Data

Variable	Method	Time-Frame
parents' perceptions	survey	Spring 2006
students' comfort	bullying survey	Spring 2006 Spring 2009
teachers' perceptions	survey	Spring 2006

Table 10: Secondary Questions Research Framework

Research Goal	Data Required	Method of Data Collection	Product	Time-Frame
the development of a board profile and three district school profiles	- student enrolment - staffing data - student residency - class sizes - free/reduced lunch rates - Special Education Identification rate	INAC Nominal Roll, Staff Roster, school registers, Hot Lunch applications, OSR's, personnel files	School and AMBE Profiles in chart format	Annually, beginning in 2006 to 2009
the analysis of historical standardized testing results (Canadian Test of Basic Skills)	CTBS Scores from 2005 and 2006	Collected at the AMBE Office	charts narrative	2006-2007
the setting of baseline data from the first administration of Ontario's EQAO testing in grade 3 and 6	EQAO Test Scores for Grade 3 & 6	Results received from the EQAO	testing results	2007
The setting of benchmarks for the two subsequent administrations of EQAO	EQAO Test Scores for Grade 3 & 6	Results received from the EQAO	testing results	2008 2009
development and implementation of a professional development plan for teaching and administrative staff to effectively implement the plan	- AMBE Comprehensive Improvement Plan - reading standards - writing standards - mathematics standards	Convene a Professional Development Committee	Professional Development Plan for 2006-2009	October 2006 May 2007 May 2008 May 2009
project resource allocations to implement the comprehensive improvement plan	INAC Funding Formula and Guidelines	Director of Education Associate Director	budget projections for 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10	On-going
assessment of the district-wide improvement plan	- EQAO Test Scores - CTBS Scores	provincial performance targets	- testing results - observations and interviews	May 2009

5.6 Significance of the Study

The study has significance to both the political and educational community of Akwesasne, who took over local control of the school system from the federal government in 1985. School districts, particularly those in the research stages of developing school or district improvement plans, may find the study useful to their endeavours. First Nation school authorities, in their attempt to raise standards and student achievement to provincial levels, will also find the study to be of importance as a case study.

This research does not attempt to generalise the findings nor offer an avenue for replication. Rather the information gleaned from this case study may offer other First Nations insight into the process of improving their local education system, and thus may offer transferability. Further, the process is of importance to First Nations political councils or education authorities, and it is hoped that this endeavour will lead others to begin the journey of improving the school systems on reserves across Canada, and as a consequence make a positive impact on the lives of aboriginal children.

5.7 Summary

This study described the development, implementation, and assessment of a district-wide school improvement plan in a First Nations school board. The plan included the use of quantitative assessments, survey instruments, and the development of locally based performance indicators.

While the study focused on a First Nation community, the results of the research are useful for other school districts involved in developing and implementing school improvement plans.

CHAPTER 6

Analysis of Data

6.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 presents an analysis and description of the data collected for this study. The data analysis and results of the study are presented in six sections: 1) school and Board profiles, 2) results of the Ontario provincial Education Quality Accountability Office assessments, 3) results of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, 4) student bullying survey, 5) parent and community survey on school quality, and lastly, 6) the student population survey. Primary data for this study were collected between 2006 and 2009.

The data collected includes demographic information about each school population that is then summarised into school profiles and then a board-wide profile. This information provides background and contextual information about the population under study. For students in Grades 3 and 6, standardised assessments from the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) of the Ontario Ministry of Education are presented. Results from the Canadian Test of Basic Skills for students in Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8 are presented. These

standardised assessments act as indicators of growth and success of the improvement plan.

Further data were collected in a survey instrument on bullying for students in Grades 3 to 8 that was conducted in the spring of 2006 and again in the spring of 2009, a parent survey that was conducted in 2006, and a student population survey that was carried out in 2007. Additional documentary evidence was collected in the meeting minutes from the bi-monthly School Principals' Meetings, reports prepared and submitted to the trustees of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, and various reports submitted annually to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

All data collected for this study are systemic in that they were part of the data stream collected by the Board of Education apart from this study. Like many boards' of education, AMBE has not analysed the numerous pieces of data that it has collected and therefore reaped many benefits from this research study.

6.1 Organisation of the Data Analysis

Three school profiles and a combined board-wide profile is presented, which includes pertinent data such as school enrolment, special education identification rates, free / reduced lunch rates, pupil - teacher ratio, and the

attendance rate. Student achievement data are presented beginning with the provincial EQAO assessments in Grade 3 and 6; the CTBS standardised tests for Grades 4, 5, 7 and 8; a parent survey that was conducted in 2006; a Student Bullying Survey that was administered at the beginning and end of the study to assess the school environment, and finally a student population survey. Following the presentation of data, a discussion follows, providing contextual information and insight to the findings.

In the areas of curriculum and curriculum development, and parental involvement and engagement, a review of the initiatives and programs that were implemented are discussed and evaluated in their relation to the board-wide improvement plan.

6.2 School and Board Profiles

General student and teacher demographic data is presented to provide contextual background information about each school under study within the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education. Three years of data were collected and averaged for the profiles. Data from the three schools were then compiled to create a board-wide profile.

The rates for free and reduced lunch rates were calculated from the applications received by the Food Services Program of the Board. This information generally provides researchers with the socio-economic status (SES) of parents within the community, as students receive a free or reduced lunch rate based on combined parental levels of income. However, it must be noted here that applications received by the Food Services Program do not require income verification of income by parents, but rather it is voluntarily self reported income.

The income level for a family of four to receive a free lunch is $27,560.00 or less, and for a family of four to receive a reduced rate, the income level is $39,260.00 or less. Income tax statements from the previous year are not required, due primarily to the fact that very few parents work off of the reserve and thus do not pay taxes. Further, students who do not receive lunch at school bring their own lunches from home. Therefore, while the free and reduced lunch data provides some information about the income levels of the students in the school and within the Board, and is often used by researchers to predict academic achievement, in this study it was not weighted too heavily.

Within each school profile is the home district of residency for students. The three primary districts that the Board draws from are Tsi Snaihne, Kawehnoke, and Kana:takon, all under the jurisdiction of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on the Canadian portion of the reserve. However, the Board also

draws from the New York State side of the reserve, and from the City of Cornwall, Ontario. The Board provides transportation from the City of Cornwall, for Mohawk students who reside in Cornwall due primarily to the lack of housing found on the reserve, or for those children born to one non-Native parent. This indicates school of choice for the parent, as many parents who are residents of Cornwall make the choice to send their children to the schools of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education rather than to a school within the Upper Canada District School Board. These Mohawk students, who hold status under the Indian Act, are added to the Nominal Roll for both funding and recording purposes to INAC.

In 2005, the Board began an effort to require all current teaching staff to attain teacher qualifications or certification. New teaching staff is required to hold teaching qualifications as part of the interview screening process, and a provision is written into the contract which requires that they continue to hold such qualifications or employment will be terminated. The task of getting all current staff members qualified has taken almost five years. Several staff members had the requisite degrees for eligibility in the Ontario College of Teachers or the New York State Education Department, the licensing bodies, but had not completed the additional requirements for licensure. Several other staff members needed to complete degrees or take the requisite courses or pass certification

examinations. This process has caused some conflict between the teaching staff and the Board administration: at the start of the 2005/06 school year only 77% of the staff held teaching licenses, but as of the 2009/10 school year, 98% of the staff now hold full teaching licenses. It is anticipated that with the start of the 2010/11 school year, 100% of teaching staff members will hold a teaching license.

Table 11: Tsi Snaihne School Profile

Head Start, K4, K5, Grades 1, 2 & K4 to Grade 4 Skahwatsi:ra Year School Opened – 1976	Average Over 3 Years	
	Number	**(per cent)**
Total Student Enrolment	*184*	-
Students from Tsi Snaihne District	*87*	*(47%)*
Students from Kana:takon District	*15*	*(8%)*
Students from Kawehnoke District	*41*	*(22%)*
Students from Cornwall, ON	*15*	*(8%)*
Students from Akwesasne, NY	*20*	*(11%)*
Special Education Rate	*22*	*(13%)*
Free / Reduced Lunch Rate	*87*	*(47%)*
Total Teaching Staff	*26*	-
General Education	*9*	-
Kanien'kéha	*5*	-
Special Education	*6*	-
Instructional Support	*6*	-
First Nations Staffing Rate	*21*	*(80%)*
Teacher Certification Rate	*16*	*(88%)*
School Attendance Rate	-	*(91.12%)*
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	*12 : 1*	-

Note: Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100%.

The Tsi Snaihne School is located in the District of Tsi Snaihne (also known as Chenail or Snye) in the Province of Quebec and was constructed in 1976 with a major addition opening in 1998 (see map Appendix 1 for all AMBE schools). The building's total capacity is three hundred students and is currently only being utilised at 61%. Before the restructuring of the school system in 2000/2001, the Tsi Snaihne School, formerly known as the Chenail Indian Day School, operated from K4 to Grade 6. In 2001, Tsi Snaihne School became a Primary School with a grade configuration from K4 to Grade 2. In 2005, a Head Start site for three-year-olds, funded by Health Canada under the Aboriginal Head Start Program, was added to the configuration. The school also houses the Skahwatsi:ra or Mohawk Language Immersion Program for K4 to Grade 4, where students receive instruction in the Mohawk language for all subjects. While the students at Tsi Snaihne School were not part of the study, the school acts as a feeder school to the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School and thus provides relevant contextual information to the study. See Table 11.

Table 12: Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School Profile

Head Start, K4, K5, Grades 3, 4, 5, & 6	Average Over 3 Years	
	Number	**(per cent)**
Year School Opened - 1980		
Total Student Enrolment	*223*	-
Students from Tsi Snaihne District	*47*	*(21%)*
Students from Kana:takon District	*22*	*(10%)*
Students from Kawehnoke District	*109*	*(49%)*
Students from Cornwall, ON	*29%*	*(13%)*
Students from Akwesasne, NY	*7*	*(3%)*
Special Education Rate	*44*	*(21%)*
Free / Reduced Lunch Rate	*87*	*(39%)*
Total Teaching Staff	*21*	
General Education	*11*	-
Kanien'kéha	*2*	-
Special Education	*2*	-
Instructional Support	*6*	-
First Nations Staffing Rate	*14*	*(68%)*
Teacher Certification Rate	*15*	*(85%)*
School Attendance Rate	-	*(92.49%)*
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	*14 : 1*	-

Note: Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100%.

Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School is located in the District of Kawehnoke (also known as Cornwall Island) in the Province of Ontario. The school was constructed in 1980 with a major addition completed in 1996. The building's total capacity is four hundred and forty students and is at 50% capacity. Before the restructuring of the school system in 2001, Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School, formerly known as the Cornwall Island Indian Day School, operated from K4 to Grade 8 and took in students from the other two schools for Grades 7 and 8. In 2000/2001, Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School became a Junior Division School with a grade configuration of K4, K5, and Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. In 2005, a Head Start site for three-year-olds, funded by Health Canada under the Aboriginal Head Start Program, was added to the configuration. See Table 12.

Table 13: Kana:takon School Profile

Head Start, K4, K5, Grades 7 & 8	Average Over 3 Years	
Year School Opened - 1993	**Number**	**(per cent)**
Total Student Enrolment	*104*	-
Students from Tsi Snaihne District	*22*	*(21%)*
Students from Kana:takon District	*31*	*(30%)*
Students from Kawehnoke District	*35*	*(34%)*
Students from Cornwall, ON	*5*	*(5%)*
Students from Akwesasne, NY	*10*	*(10%)*
Special Education Rate	*20*	*(22%)*
Free / Reduced Lunch Rate	*44*	*(42%)*
Total Teaching Staff	*10*	-
General Education	*6*	-
Kanien'kéha	*1*	-
Special Education	*1*	-
Instructional Support	*2*	-
First Nations Staffing Rate	*8*	*(77%)*
Teacher Certification Rate	*7*	*(83%)*
School Attendance Rate	-	*(89.59%)*
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	*14 : 1*	-

Note: Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100%.

Kana:takon School is located in the District of Kana:takon (also known as St. Regis Village) in the Province of Quebec. The school was constructed in

1993 and replaced a large wooden structure built in the 1940's. The building's total capacity is one hundred and eighty five students and is at 56% capacity. Before the restructuring of the school system in 2001, Kana:takon School, formerly known as the St. Regis Village School, operated from K4 to Grade 6. In 2000/2001, Kana:takon School became an Early Intermediate Division School with a grade configuration of K4, K5, and Grades 7 and 8. In 2005, a Head Start site for three-year-olds, funded by Health Canada under the Aboriginal Head Start Program, was added to the configuration. See Table 13.

Table 14: Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education Profile

Date School Board Created – December 1985 **First Full Year of Local Control : 1987 / 88**	Average Over 3 Years **Number**	 **(per cent)**
Total Student Enrolment in Board	*509*	-
Students from Tsi Snaihne District	*153*	*(30%)*
Students from Kana:takon District	*81*	*(16%)*
Students from Kawehnoke District	*178*	*(35%)*
Students from Cornwall, ON	*46*	*(9%)*
Students from Akwesasne, NY	*41*	*(8%)*
Special Education Rate	*88*	*(19%)*
Free / Reduced Lunch Rate	*219*	*(43%)*
Total Teaching Staff	*57*	
General Education	*26*	-
Kanien'kéha	*8*	-
Special Education	*9*	-
Instructional Support	*14*	-
First Nations Staffing Rate	*43*	*(75%)*
Teacher Certification Rate	*38*	*(88%)*
Board-wide Attendance Rate	-	*(91.06%)*
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	*13 : 1*	-

Note: Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100%.

Between 2006 and 2009, the Board held a fairly steady rate of enrolment of just over five hundred students and just under seventy teaching and support

staff. The Board's full capacity is nine hundred and twenty five students and the school buildings are at 56% capacity. The number of First Nations teaching and instructional support staff in the three schools and within the Board's administration is quite high at 72%. The attendance rate for Board students has also been stable over the three years under study at just over 91%. Of particular note for the Board is the degree attainment rate for teachers in the Kanienkeha and Skahwatsi:ra program who teach Mohawk language, with all nine staff members holding a bachelor's degree, and with two holding a master's degree. Also notable for the Board is the low pupil to teacher ratio of 13 students to 1 teacher. See Table 14.

6.3 Student Achievement Results of the Provincial Assessments

The EQAO assessments were introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1996 and have been administered in several formats since that time. The assessments are administered to Grade 3 and 6 students across the province in all publicly funded schools in Ontario. For private schools and First Nations schools, the administration of the assessments is voluntary and a fee is charged. While the Ontario Region Office of the Department of Indian and

Northern Affairs encourages participation in the assessments, it is not mandatory and is left to the discretion of the individual First Nation.

The EQAO assessments employ the successive student cohort design to assess year-to-year student achievement and focuses on status at the time of the test. The assessments are developed using the most current Ontario curriculum expectations in reading, writing, and mathematics. Changes in the Ontario curriculum will correspond to changes in the assessments. Students are assessed over a two week period, generally in late May and early June in a time-frame as set by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education has set the levels of achievement on a four-level Likert scale with Level 3 as the provincial standard for proficiency in the subject area. Students who achieve a Level 3 or 4 are reported as being at or above the provincial standard and thus proficient in the subject area.

During the 2007 and 2008 administrations with AMBE, no students were exempted from the assessments and the Board of Education reported a 100% participation rate. However, during the 2009 administration, four Grade 3 students were exempted in reading, while five Grade 6 students were exempted in reading, one in writing, and four in math. Students were formally exempted due to special education needs, exceptionalities that were approved by EQAO. Exemptions are only granted for students who have met criteria set out in their

Individual Education Plan (IEP) as determined by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) within each school.

The first administration of the Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments for Grades 3 and 6 in the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education occurred in the spring of 2007, with administrations following in the spring of 2008 and 2009. The results from the first year of the test administration in 2007 were determined to be the setting of baseline data.

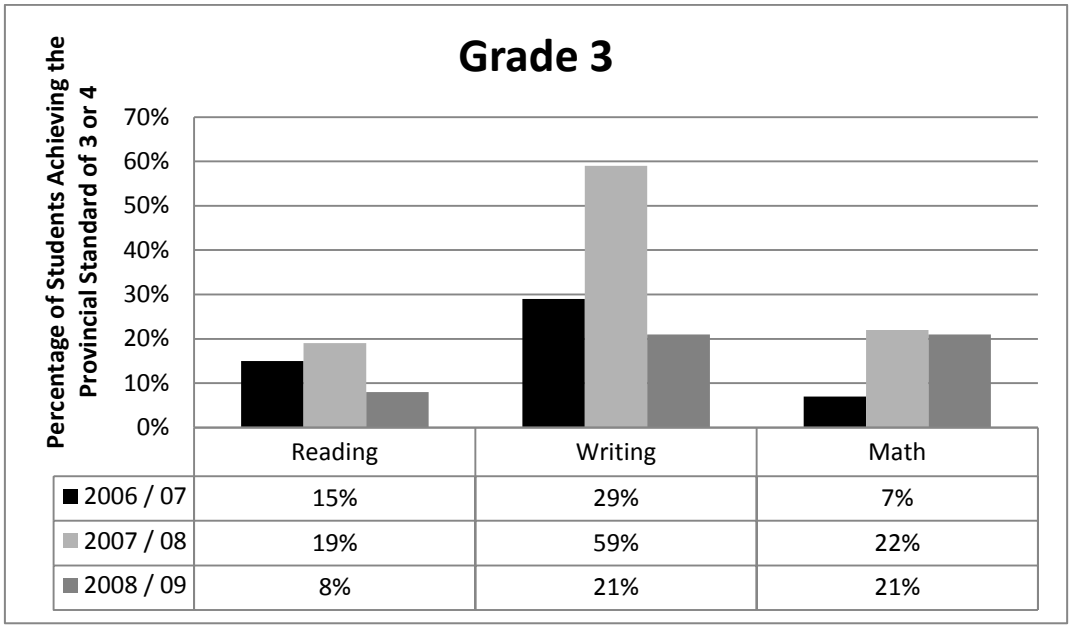
Table 15: EQAO Number of Participating Students by Year and Grade

Year	Grade 3	Grade 6	Total
2006 / 07	*41*	*39*	*80*
2007 / 08	*32*	*38*	*70*
2008 / 09	*36*	*55*	*91*

The results for Grades 3 and 6 will be presented with a discussion to follow after each grade level. An additional seven students in the Grade 6 Mohawk Language Transitional Program at the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School completed the Grade 6 CTBS assessment in 2009. Their results are presented separately.

6.2.2 Grade 3 Results

Figure 1: Grade 3 EQAO Results



	Reading	Writing	Math
2006 / 07	15%	29%	7%
2007 / 08	19%	59%	22%
2008 / 09	8%	21%	21%

In Grade 3 (see Figure 1), 15% of the students achieved the provincial standard in reading, with 56% attaining a Level 2. In writing, 29% reached the provincial standard, with 68% achieving a Level 2. In math, 7% achieved the provincial standard, with an additional 68% attaining a Level 2. In 2008, 19% of the students achieved the standard in reading, a 4% increase from the previous year, with 72% attaining a Level 2. In writing, 59% of the students achieved the provincial standard, an increase of 30% over the previous year, and with 38% reaching a Level 2. In math, 22% of the students achieved the provincial standard, a 15% increase over the previous year, with 69% attaining a Level 2.

The 2009 school year would mark significant decreases in all areas except math. In reading, only 8% achieved the provincial standard, an 11% decrease from the previous year, and 39% achieved a Level 2. In writing, only 21% of the students achieved the provincial standard, a 38% decrease from the 2008 administration, but 76% achieved a Level 2. In math, 21% of the students achieved the provincial standard, a 1% decrease from the previous year, although still markedly higher than the 2007 administration. Additionally, 76% of the students achieved a Level 2 in math.

Table 16: Grade 3 Students Achieving at a Level 2

Year	Reading	Writing	Math
2006 / 07	*56%*	*68%*	*68%*
2007 / 08	*72%*	*38%*	*69%*
2008 / 09	*39%*	*76%*	*76%*

In comparison (See Table 16), the achievement level for all Grade 3 students in provincially funded schools in Ontario in Grade 3 for 2007 was 62% in reading, 64% in writing, and 69% in math. In 2008, the provincial average in reading was 61%, in writing 66%, and 68% in math. In 2009, the provincial average in reading was 61%, 68% in writing, and 70% in math (EQAO, 2009).

As an additional comparator, a look at the results of Rothwell-Osnabruck Elementary School, a local area school within the Upper Canada District School Board with comparable class sizes and demographic data (i.e., percent born in Canada, English language learners, etc.) was reviewed. The data showed that during the 2009 provincial administration, 34% of the Grade 3 students achieved the provincial target in reading, while in writing 31% achieved the target, and 37% achieved the standard in math (EQAO School and Board Results, www.eqao.ca, retrieved December 10, 2009).

As a further comparator, Sioux Mountain Public School, a school in northern Ontario under the jurisdiction of the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board was reviewed as it also has similar class sizes to AMBE with a large aboriginal population. A review of their results for the 2008/09 assessments show that in Grade 3, 33% achieved the provincial target in reading, 47% in writing, and 37% in math (EQAO School and Board Results, www.eqao.ca, retrieved December 10, 2009).

6.3.1 Discussion on the Grade 3 Results

The 2007 administration of the provincial assessments in Grade 3 were considerably below the provincial average. However, a look back at the provincial results during the first several years of the assessments showed

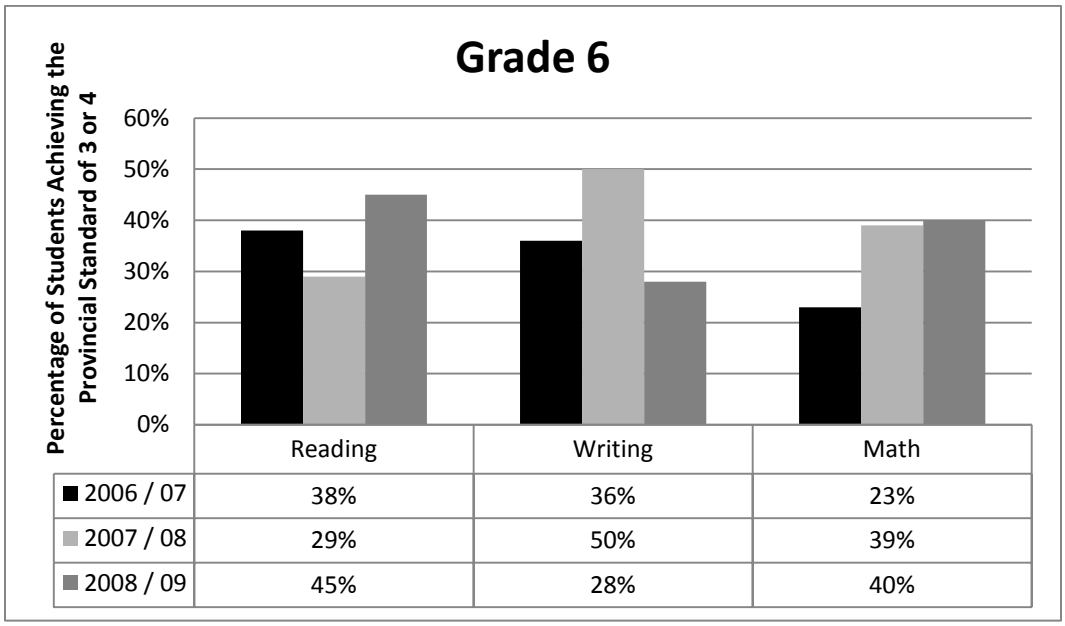
similarly low results. During the 1996/97 school year administration in the province, the first year that the assessments were piloted in Ontario, 50% of students achieved the provincial target in reading, 39% in writing, and 33% in math (EQAO, 1997). In their final report that year, EQAO presented data that calculated students at Levels 2, 3, and 4 to show student achievement in each area.

The 2008 administration saw considerable gains in writing and math for AMBE, but with minimal growth in reading. The increase in the writing assessment was quite large, showing a 30% increase and was only 7% below the provincial average. The gain in math was also significant, increasing by 15% percentage points. Students attaining a Level 2 in all three areas were also significant.

However, all of those gains were lost on the 2009 administration of the assessments. As will be discussed in detail later, political events in the community that led to the closure of the schools and the total reconfiguration of the school system during the assessments may have had an impact on the final year of data collection. Further, the status cohort design of the assessments, which captures the achievement of a group of students at one point in time, should also be considered.

6.3.2 Grade 6 Results

Figure 2: Grade 6 EQAO Results



	Reading	Writing	Math
2006 / 07	38%	36%	23%
2007 / 08	29%	50%	39%
2008 / 09	45%	28%	40%

In the 2007 administration of the provincial assessments, 38% of the Grade 6 students (see Figure 2) achieved the provincial standard in reading, with an additional 36% achieving at a Level 2. In writing, 36% met the provincial target, with an additional 56% attaining a Level 2. In math, 23% achieved the provincial standard, with an additional 51% attaining a Level 2. In comparison, the achievement level for students in provincially funded schools in Ontario in Grade 3 for 2007 was 64% in reading, 61% in writing, and 59% in math.

In 2008, 29% of the students achieved the provincial target in reading, with 36% achieving a Level 2. In writing, 50% met the target, with 50% achieving

a Level 2. In math, 39% achieved the provincial benchmark, with 53% achieving a Level 2 (see Table 17). In comparison, the achievement level for students in provincially funded schools in Ontario in Grade 6 for 2008 was 66% in reading, 67% in writing, and 61% in math.

In 2009, 45% of the Grade 6 students achieved the provincial target in reading, with 30% achieving a Level 2. In writing, 28% achieved the provincial target, with 68% attaining a Level 2. In math, 40% achieved the target, with 36% achieving a Level 2. In comparison, the achievement level for students in provincially funded schools in Ontario in Grade 6 for 2007 was 69% in reading, 67% in writing, and 63% in math (EQAO, 2009).

Table 17: Grade 6 Students Achieving at a Level 2

Year	Reading	Writing	Math
2006 / 07	*36%*	*56%*	*51%*
2007 / 08	*47%*	*50%*	*53%*
2008 / 09	*30%*	*68%*	*36%*

As with the Grade 3 results, the comparator school of Rothwell-Osnabruck Elementary School of the Upper Canada District School Board was reviewed. The data showed that during the 2009 provincial administration, 57% of the Grade 6 students achieved the provincial target in reading, while in writing 50%

achieved the target, and 52% achieved the standard in math (EQAO School and Board Results, www.eqao.ca, retrieved December 10, 2009).

As a further comparator, Sioux Mountain Public School, a school of the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board was also used. A review of their results for the 2008/09 assessments show that in Grade 6, 50% achieved the provincial target in reading, 39% in writing, and 33% in math (EQAO School and Board Results, www.eqao.ca, retrieved December 10, 2009).

6.3.3 Discussion

The political turmoil in the community, caused by the Canadian federal government's proposed arming of the Customs Agents on Cornwall Island, led to the abandonment of the Canada Customs House by Agents and culminated in the closure of the port of entry. Shortly before midnight on May 31, minutes before the deadline for the arming of the Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA), the Customs House was abandoned.

With the administration of the 2009 assessment set for the last week in May and the first week in June, the closure of the port of entry on June 1st was devastating to the administration of the assessments. Schools were closed for three days while plans were prepared to re-open the schools in a new configuration. The closure of the port of entry shut down the Seaway

International Bridge, the only access point to Cornwall Island and to the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School. Students were blocked access to their school when the United States port of entry was closed in response to the closure of the Canada Customs House.

The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education was forced to temporarily close the schools when the port of entry closed. The three schools, structured by grade level, were re-configured. Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School, the school responsible for administering the EQAO assessments in Grades 3 and 6, was reconfigured to house students from Head Start to Grade 8 for students' resident on Cornwall Island. The two other schools were reconfigured to house students from Head Start to Grade 4, and from Grade 5 to Grade 8 for students' resident of the districts of Tsi Snaihne and Kana:takon.

The schools re-opened on Thursday, June 4, 2009, with only two days remaining to complete the assessments. The assessments had to be sorted as students would now be taking the test in different schools and with different teachers administering them. The only way to get the assessments to the schools was by boat, as the bridge access had been closed. The assessments were sorted, wrapped in plastic to safeguard them from water damage, and the Curriculum Specialist couriered them across the river to deliver them to their

respective schools. At all times the assessments had to be safeguarded to ensure that they were not opened and the tests compromised.

The stress that the students and staff members were under was quite high. With only two days to complete the assessments, the impact on the students' ability to successfully complete the assessments was compromised. The fact that students were riding different school buses with different drivers, attending different schools, and being taught by different teachers invariably had an impact. Travel within the territory of Akwesasne was impacted, and many teachers and students had to travel by boat on the St. Lawrence River to get to work, go shopping, visit family, and in some cases, to attend school. The closure of the port of entry extended throughout the summer, so graduations for students in Grades 6, 8, and 12 were re-organized and a cruise boat was hired to transport students from their home districts to attend the graduation in their original school. All of these conditions were not conducive for the students to take such high stakes assessments and without doubt had an impact on the results.

Comparators were included to provide a larger perspective on the Board's participation in the provincial assessments. While provincial results are useful, it must be understood that the provincial school boards had ten years of administering the assessments before the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of

Education began to administer them. Further, the provincial schools have the Ministry of Education and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat's office to provide the needed supports to school boards. These supports include both curriculum and staffing to assist school boards to identify areas of need and to address the gaps. First Nations schools do not receive these supports.

Table 18: EQAO Academic Performance

	2007	2008
Grade 3 Average Level		
Reading	*1.8*	*2.1*
Writing	*2.3*	*2.6*
Math	*1.9*	*2.1*
Grade 6 Average Level		
Reading	*2.1*	*2.1*
Writing	*2.3*	*2.5*
Math	*2*	*2.3*
Tests below standard (%)	*75.3*	*63.3*
Tests not written (%)	*0.4*	*0*
Overall Rating Out of 10	*0*	*1.6*

Note. Adapted from "Cowley, Peter, and Easton, Stephen. (2009). Report Card on Ontario's elementary schools 2009 edition. Vancouver, B.C.: The Fraser Institute, pp. 153, 170.

Two provincially funded schools were also used as comparators, one within the local area, and the other in north western Ontario. The schools were chosen because of their similar class sizes and other demographic data reported to the EQAO. It is understood that a better comparator would have been an aboriginal school in southern Ontario. However, such detailed data is not available. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada operates the Quinte Mohawk School in the Mohawk territory of Tyendinaga, a First Nation reserve near Belleville, Ontario. The official EQAO report is not available for public access, as the school is not a publically funded provincial school, but rather is considered a private school. Neither INAC nor the school will release the full report. However, the Fraser Institute's 2008 Report on Ontario's Schools ranks Quinte Mohawk at 2,746 out of 2,778 schools, the same ranking that it gave to the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School in 2008. Both Quinte Mohawk and the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School received a score of 1.6 out of 10. The Quinte Mohawk School has been administering the EQAO assessments since 2005/06, one year longer than the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education.

The Fraser Institute's school report shows significant increases in all areas except reading for the Grade 6 students. For tests marked below the standard, the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk School improved from 75.3% in 2007 to 63.3% in 2008, a 12% improvement. There is no data for the 2009 EQAO administration,

as the Fraser Institute does not release its report until April of 2010. However, the increase and improvement from the two reports is quite significant. See Table 18.

6.4 Results of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills

The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education first administered the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in 1996, and has tested students annually since 2002 – 03. The standardised test measures student achievement in reading, language, and mathematics, and gives each student a grade level equivalent in each of the subject areas as well as a composite score for grade equivalency. One school year is equivalent to ten months, and growth is calculated in each area. In reading the grade equivalent, the first number is the grade level, and the second number is the month of instruction. The overall composite grade equivalency score has generally been used by school administrators to monitor both instruction and student achievement.

The CTBS examinations are given annually to each grade level except Grades 3 and 6, who take the EQAO assessments. The 2006/07 school year was considered the first year of the school improvement plan under study, and the 2008/09 school year was considered the final year under study. The CTBS

examinations were administered in May of each year and scored by the company, with the results mailed to the Board Office by mid June.

Table 19: Grade 4 CTBS Results

	Year 1 2006 /07 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 2 2007 / 08 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 3 2008 / 09 Grade Equivalent	NPR
Reading	4-3	*37*	4-3	*38*	4-5	*42*
Language	4-2	*41*	4-8	*52*	4-8	*51*
Mathematics	5-2	*58*	4-8	*54*	4-6	*46*
Composite	4-4	*44*	4-7	*48*	4-6	*46*

The Grade 4 results (see Table 19) show that students achieved minimal growth in reading, noteworthy growth in language, and a decrease in mathematics. As well, the composite grade equivalency growth only increased by two months from the first administration in 2006 to the final administration in 2009. The national percentile rank (NPR) shows growth in all areas except mathematics from Year 1 to Year 2.

Table 20: Grade 5 CTBS Results

	Year 1 2006 / 07 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 2 2007 / 08 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 3 2008 / 09 Grade Equivalent	NPR
Reading	5-1	*37*	5-9	*53*	4-8	*32*
Language	5-2	*41*	6-1	*55*	5-0	*39*
Mathematics	6-0	*54*	7-4	*76*	5-7	*52*
Composite	5-3	*43*	6-3	*61*	5-2	*40*

The Grade 5 students (see Table 20) showed no positive amount of growth between 2006 and 2009, and actually lost between one and three months of instruction. However, there was considerable growth between the first two years, with eight months of growth in reading, nine months of growth in language, fourteen months of growth in mathematics, and one full year of growth in the grade equivalency composite score. The NPR showed the greatest increases from Year 1 to Year 2, but levelled off in Year 3. There was significant growth in reading and mathematics, and the composite score from Year 1 to Year 2, but with the community conflict that happened in Year 3, all gains were lost.

Table 21: Grade 7 CTBS Results

	Year 1 2006 / 07 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 2 2007 / 08 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 3 2008 / 09 Grade Equivalent	NPR
Reading	5-7	*24*	7-1	*42*	6-2	*31*
Language	5-8	*28*	8-1	*54*	6-5	*37*
Mathematics	6-3	*29*	7-7	*49*	7-6	*46*
Composite	5-9	*25*	7-6	*48*	6-6	*36*

The Grade 7 (see Table 21) students showed the most significant amount of growth of all of the classes, particularly between year 1 and year 2. In reading, there was fourteen months of growth between year 1 and 2, and five months of growth between year 1 and year 3. In language, the Grade 7 students achieved twenty three months of growth from year 1 to year 2, and seven months of growth between year 1 and year 3. In mathematics, there was substantial growth between Years 1 and 2, and between Years 1 and 3. The composite grade equivalency score increased substantially between Years 1 and 2, a growth of sixteen months, and seven months of growth between Year 1 and Year 3. The NPR showed the greatest increases from Year 1 to Year 2, but again all scores

levelled off in Year 3. There was significant growth in reading, language, mathematics, and the composite score from Year 1 to Year 2, but with the community conflict that happened in Year 3, all gains were lost.

Table 22: Grade 8 CTBS Results

	Year 1 2006 / 07 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 2 2007 / 08 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 3 2008 / 09 Grade Equivalent	NPR
Reading	7-0	*30*	7-4	*34*	7-0	*30*
Language	6-5	*28*	7-0	*34*	7-8	*40*
Mathematics	7-5	*34*	8-7	*51*	8-1	*43*
Composite	6-9	*29*	7-7	*37*	7-5	*36*

The Grade 8 (see Table 22) students showed growth in all areas between year 1 and year 2, and growth in all areas except reading between year 1 and year 3. Mathematics saw the most growth between year 1 and year 2 with twelve months of growth, but also saw a significant increase of six months between year 1 and year 3. The overall composite grade equivalency score increased substantially between both year 1 and year 2 and between year 1 and year 3. The NPR for language, mathematics, and the composite score showed a

significant amount of growth for all years, but the greatest amount of growth occurred between Year 1 and Year 2.

6.4.1 Grade 6 Mohawk Language Transition Program

Table 23: Grade 6 Mohawk Language Immersion CTBS Results

	Year 1 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 2 Grade Equivalent	NPR	Year 3 2008 / 09 Grade Equivalent	NPR
Reading					4-6	*19*
Language					4-2	*17*
Mathematics					4-6	*14*
Composite					4-4	*14*

The students in the Mohawk Language Transition Program (see Table 23) were in the full immersion Skahwatsi:ra Program at the Tsi Snaihne School. They had instruction only in the Mohawk language from K4 to Grade 4, and then entered the Transition Program in Grade 5. The Transition Program also went through a growth and development period, expanding from just Grade 5 the first year to a split Grade 5/6 by the third year.

With only one year of data, it is clear that the students are at least two grade levels below at the end of the Grade 6. This puts them at a disadvantage when they enter Grade 7.

Discussion

The results for the final year of administration may have been impacted by the political turmoil in the community, as noted previously in the analysis of the EQAO assessments. The substantial amount of growth for all classes except Grade 4 between year 1 and year 2 was promising to teachers and to the school administrators. However, the impact of the events in the community during May, when the tests were being administered, cannot be disregarded. Again, the stressors on the students, their home and family life, and the bus ride daily from home to school cannot be underestimated.

6.5 Student Bullying Survey

A survey on bullying for students in grades 3 to 8 was administered in the spring of 2006 and then again in the spring of 2009 (see Appendix 3). The survey results are presented here, giving an insight into how students feel about the school system in relation to their safety and comfort level while attending

school. This analysis provides insight and valuable information to teachers and school administrators about the school system and of the students' perception of their place within their respective school.

Students in Grades 3 to 8 were given a survey on bullying, consisting of five questions (see Appendix 2). The first question was open-ended and asked students to define the term bullying. The responses to this question were then compiled for the teachers to review and to assess the students' understanding of the concept of bullying. The second question asked the students if they had experienced acts of bullying and asked them to check off various boxes, allowing them to check off multiple acts of bullying that they may have experienced. The survey also allowed the students to add a bullying behaviour if it did not appear on the list. Students were then asked if the alleged bully was their age or older, and if they had reported the bullying incident. The final question asked them to rate their school on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating that a lot of bullying takes place and that they don't feel safe at school, and 4 indicating that bullying rarely takes place and they felt very safe at school.

Table 24: Survey Respondents

Grade Level	2006	2009
Grade 3	*40*	*20*
Grade 4	*28*	*42*
Grade 5	*31*	*48*
Grade 6	*47*	*46*
Grade 7	*30*	*14*
Grade 8	*34*	*22*
Total	***210***	***192***
Total Enrolment	*263*	*241*
	79.8% response rate	79.6% response rate

The response rate for both survey administrations was very high with nearly 80% for both years (see Table 24). However there were notable differences by grade level, with only half of the Grade 3 students and Grade 7 students participating in the 2009 administration as compared to the 2006 survey.

Table 25: Bullying Survey Question 1 Results

Have you been bullied:	2006	2009
1. Physically	*43.3%*	*33.3%*
2. Verbally	*69.0%*	*42.7%*
3. Socially	*50.5%*	*33.9%*
4. Written	*32.4%*	*16.7%*
5. Property	*54.8%*	*18.8%*
6. Other	*11.4%*	*12.5%*

Reported incidents by type of bullying behaviours all decreased significantly from the 2006 to the 2009 survey administration, most notably verbal and the loss or damage to personal property (see Table 25). Physical bullying showed a decrease of 11%, as well as decreases in social and written bullying, which is often characterised by the exclusion of students from social groupings and activities.

Table 26: Bullying Survey Question 2 Results

	Females		Males		Total Males - Females	
	2006	2009	2006	2009	2006	2009
Was the bully						
My age	*56%*	*58%*	*46%*	*43%*	*52%*	*51%*
Older	*56%*	*28%*	*51%*	*26%*	*54%*	*27%*
Not Indicated	*4%*	*2%*	*6%*	*2%*	*5%*	*2%*
Did you tell anyone?						
Yes	*53%*	*56%*	*36%*	*35%*	*46%*	*46%*
No	*38%*	*21%*	*55%*	*32%*	*45%*	*26%*

There was a 27% decrease in older students bullying younger students between the two survey administrations. Also noteworthy between the two survey administrations was that fewer students were not reporting incidents of bullying behaviours, with more students reporting it to their teacher or school principal, as well as to the school counsellor. See Table 26.

Table 27: Bullying Survey Question 5

At my school, I think that:	Females		Males		Total Females – Males & Unidentified Gender		Change
	2006	2009	2006	2009	2006	2009	
Lots of bullying takes place, no one does anything about it. I do not feel safe.	*27%*	*5%*	*26%*	*9%*	*29.7%*	*7.4%*	*-22.3%*
Sometimes bullying happens; someone might do something about it. I feel a little safe.	*29%*	*35%*	*28%*	*28%*	*31.4%*	*34.7%*	*+3.3%*
Bullying hardly ever happens, but it is usually dealt with, so I feel pretty safe.	*19%*	*33%*	*20%*	*27%*	*19%*	*32%*	*+13%*
Bullying rarely if ever happens because it is not acceptable here. I feel very safe.	*17%*	*21%*	*17%*	*26%*	*17%*	*23%*	*+6%*

2006 Survey: SD 1.07; 95% CI 2.12 – 2.43; 2.90; 88.1% Response Rate

2009 Survey: SD 0.92; 95% CI 2.63 - 91.7% Response Rate

Students' level of comfort and safety at school showed the most dramatic increases between the 2006 and 2009 survey administration. In 2006, 55% of students rated their school at a Level 1 or 2, indicating that there were lots of acts

of bullying at their school and that they did not generally feel safe at school. In the 2009 survey administration, only 39% of students rated their school at a level 1 or 2. In 2006, only 36% of students indicated that their schools were at a Level 3 or 4, and that they felt quite safe at school. In the 2009 survey administration, 55% of students rated their school at level 3 or 4, indicating that they felt quite safe at school. See Table 27.

6.6 Parent and Community Survey

Before the start of the current study, a parent survey was conducted between late February and March of 2006 to form part of a district evaluation. Several focus meetings were held with the Trustees of the Board of Education to develop questions or statements for the survey. Forty statements were submitted by the trustees, and after much debate, twenty were agreed upon (see Appendix 4). A survey instrument was developed with a Likert Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree” to statements such as “I feel welcome at my child’s school.”

The survey instruments were distributed to parents and community members at the three schools during report card nights, as well as at the Board’s annual community evening. Additional surveys were sent home with students.

Four hundred and seventy six surveys were distributed with one hundred and ninety seven returned, for a response rate of 41%.

The surveys were collected and organized by school. Responses were tabulated using simple averages. The responses were then organised according to the three components of the study: Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery, School Environment, and Parental and Community Engagement. Subheadings under School Environment were added to include "Home – School relationship," and "Community – Public Relations" were added under Parental and Community Engagement.

A second follow up survey at the end of the study was not conducted due to the political unrest in the community. The Board of Education felt that the uncertainty with the border crossing and with the community's frustration over the long wait times at the Canadian and U.S. border stations would overshadow questions about the three district schools. Additionally, with the travel restrictions within the community, the ability to conduct a survey could not be guaranteed. While this study is missing an important follow up perspective from the parents, the first survey provides much useful data and information.

Table 28: Parent Survey: Critical Planning Area 1

Critical Planning Area 1: **Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery**	Response Level Out of 5
The school prepares the children for the future	*3.9*
I like the school's report card / progress reports	*4.1*
The school's assessment practices are fair	*3.8*
Overall, the school performs well academically	*4.9*

Under Critical Planning Area 1 – Curriculum and Curriculum Delivery (see Table 28), the survey showed that parents generally felt that the schools are adequately preparing their children for future study, and they overwhelmingly believed that the schools are progressing at a high level academically.

Table 29: Parent Survey Critical Planning Area 2

Critical Planning Area 2: School Environment	**Response Level Out of 5**
My child is happy at school and usually wants to be there	*3.9*
My child is safe at school	*4.0*
My child has the opportunity to go on worthwhile fieldtrips	*3.6*
I feel welcome at my child's school	*4.2*
(Home - School Connection and Relationships)	
I respect the school's teachers	*4.3*
I respect the school's principal	*4.3*
I believe the staff at the school respect parents / community	*4.0*

Under Critical Planning Area 2 – the School Environment (see Table 29), parents also felt strongly that their child was not only safe at school, but happy as well. This related to the similar findings in the student bullying survey. The climate of the school was also positive, as parents felt welcomed at the school. There is also a mutual respect between parents and the school personnel.

Table 30: Parent Survey Critical Planning Area 3

Critical Planning Area 3: Parental and Community Engagement	**Response Level Out of 5**
I am informed about my child's progress	*4.2*
I support my child's learning at home	*4.2*
My child's teacher contacts me regularly, not just when there is a problem	*3.2*
My child's teacher helps me to help my child at home	*3.9*
I know how well my child is progressing in school	*4.2*
I know what my child's teacher expects of my child	*3.9*
(Community and Public Relations)	
The school has a good public image	*3.9*
My school board representatives are helpful when I have questions about the school	*3.2*
School activities / students achievements are regularly published in the local media	*3.6*

The results for parental involvement and engagement within the schools are also strong (see Table 30), as parents felt that they were kept abreast of their

child's progress at school. However, one area that needs improvement in the area of teacher and parent relationships is that teachers need to increase contact with parents on a more regular basis. The role of the school board trustee also needs to be strengthened in each of the districts, particularly in the area of visibility. This will improve transparency of the board decision making processes and instil confidence in school board leadership.

6.7 Student Population Census

A student population census was conducted between January and May of 2007. Surveyors made three attempts to contact each household, with an 80% contact rate and a 12% refusal rate. The census was completed by a consultant and a report was submitted to the Board of Education in August of 2007.

The census was conducted to:

1. gather data about students in the three school districts to determine student residency and then compare it to actual attendance within the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education schools;

2. ascertain why students' resident of the school district chose to attend other schools outside of the jurisdiction of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education;
3. address the issue of parental choice for education within the community of Akwesasne;
4. project student and classroom enrolment;
5. assist in the evaluation of current programs.

Surveyors conducted the census within each of the three districts of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, namely Tsi Snaihne, Kana:takon, and Kawehnoke (Cornwall Island). The three districts comprise the school district of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education. Respondents were asked how many children lived in the residence. If there were children living in the residence, then the surveyor asked for the number of children, their ages, and which school(s) they attended. If the children were not attending a school within AMBE, the respondents were asked to check off a list of reasons why, and they were also given the opportunity to respond with reasons of their own under the category of "other reasons." All responses were recorded and submitted with the final report.

The census results per each district are presented with a brief discussion. The results for the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education are then presented and discussed.

Results

Table 31: Population Census District of Tsi Snaihne Results

Households Surveyed	*177*
Total Children in Households	*208*
Average Age of Children	*10*
Percent Attending an AMBE School	*52%*
Top 4 reasons cited for not attending an AMBE School	
Higher quality education available in the U.S.	*27%*
Parent went to school in the U.S.	*15%*
Special Education Services not available	*14%*
Child(ren) started school in the U.S.	*11%*

The District of Tsi Snaihne (see Table 31), the largest and fastest growing district within the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, had the lowest percentage of students attending an AMBE school. The district, located on the eastern portion of the reserve in the Province of Quebec, is closest in proximity to the Salmon River Central School District in the State of New York, which may be one factor

why so many of the eligible students attend a school out of the district. There is also the perception of many respondents that the U.S. offers a higher quality education than found in the AMBE schools. Also noteworthy in the responses was that some of the parents had attended a school in the U.S. and thus wanted their child(ren) to attend school there as well.

Table 32: Population Census District of Kawehnoke Results

Households Surveyed	*120*
Total Children in Households	*99*
Average Age of Children	*10*
Percent Attending an AMBE School	*77%*
Top 4 reasons cited for not attending an AMBE School	
Curriculum	*10%*
Not enough after-school activities	*10%*
Lack of art and music programs	*9%*
Special Education Services not available	*6%*

The District of Kawehnoke (Cornwall Island) is the second largest district within the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and lies within the Province of Ontario (see Table 32). The district has the largest number of resident students attending an AMBE school. Among those parents who chose not to send their

child(ren) to an AMBE school, they cited the difference in the curriculum and the availability of after-school programs available in the U.S. schools.

Table 33: Population Census District of Kana:takon Results

Households Surveyed	*92*
Total Children in Households	*48*
Average Age of Children	*8.35*
Percent Attending an AMBE School	*70%*
Top 4 reasons cited for not attending an AMBE School	
Bullying	*28%*
Not enough after-school activities	*16%*
Special Education Services not available	*15%*
Lack of art and music programs	*15%*

The District of Kana:takon (see Table 33) is the smallest district in the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and lies within Quebec on the New York State border and is in the closest proximity to the St. Regis Mohawk School. In spite of the proximity to the U.S., 70% of the resident students in the district attend an AMBE school. However, of those parents who chose not to send their child(ren) to an AMBE school, they cited bullying as the primary reason.

Table 34: Population Census Results

Student Population Census *Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE)*	
Households Surveyed	389
Total Children in Households	355
Average Age of Children	9.45
Percent Attending an AMBE School	66.34%
Top 5 reasons cited for not attending an AMBE School	
Special Education Services not available	12%
Curriculum	11%
Not enough after-school activities	9.5%
Bullying	9%
Lack of art and music programs	8%

The student population census (see Table 34) showed that nearly seventy percent of the eligible resident students in the three districts are attending an AMBE school. The census also showed that many parents feel that AMBE schools cannot offer the appropriate special education services for their child(ren). The U.S. schools do offer many special education services for students with identified special needs, including one-on-one aides, occupational therapy services, physical therapy, and speech. AMBE implemented an inclusion model during the 2006/07 school year, and offered occupational

therapy and speech services to identified students, although many parents may not have been aware of that.

AMBE began offering an after-school Boys and Girls Club program during the 2005/06 school year, but again not all parents in the community may have been aware of that and cited a lack of after-school programming as one of the reasons for not enrolling their child(ren) in an AMBE school. Additionally, AMBE has offered a full art program since 2004, and a full music program since 2006. Again, many parents in the community with children in schools outside of the AMBE school district were not aware of the programming offered.

6.8 Summary

The development and implementation of the comprehensive school improvement plan created three new programs for the Board of Education, including an Early Years Program, the Skahwatsi:ra Language Immersion Program, and the Inclusive Services Program. In addition to the development of new programming, the plan implemented several new curriculum initiatives, including guided reading, a writing program, and Saxon Math. The development of locally-based indicators included increasing the teacher certification rate, developing school-based Leadership Teams as an avenue to facilitate decision

making processes at each school, assessing the Mohawk Language Immersion students, and developing school and Board profiles.

In this chapter, data and analysis for six data sets were presented. The purpose of this analysis was to respond to this study's research assumptions. In particular this study:

- assumed that using a research-based approach for school improvement planning would be appropriate in a First Nation school setting;
- assumed that a case study research design was the most appropriate for fulfilling the purpose of this study.

As the data demonstrate, the social, cultural, and political impacts of the community influence the statistical outcomes for the assessment and measurement of student achievement in the schools. These influences cannot be quantified, but they are revealed in the outcomes and measurements provided in the standardized assessments on academic achievement.

In summary, the findings for the data collected show the following:

1. The School and Board Profiles showed that student enrolment has remained steady over the past three years, an indication that parents have chosen to keep their children in the school system, rather than moving them to the competing school system in New York State. The profiles also indicate that just under half of the students come from low income households, based on the free / reduced lunch rate. In addition to a low teacher-pupil ratio, there was also a high percentage of First Nations staff in each of the schools, two of the key mandates of the Indian Control of Indian Education policy (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972).
2. The results of the provincial EQAO assessments showed that despite the changes and the advances as part of the school improvement plan, students in Grades 3 and 6 did not meet the provincial standard in reading, writing, and mathematics. After significant increases in achievement the first two years, the third year was impacted by political events within the community. Further, without the second level supports that the Ministry of Education provides to its schools, the ability of First Nations schools to provide their students with comparables is greatly hindered.

3. The results of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills showed improvements in all grade levels in the areas assessed, but again students did not attain Grade Equivalents (GE) commensurate with their grade levels, nor did they meet or exceed the National Percentile Ranks (NPR) of at least 50%, for which the tests are norm referenced.
4. The Student Bullying Survey provided an insight into the perceptions held by the students within the Board of Education and their level of safety and security. There were significant increases in student comfort and safety in their school from the two administrations, an indication that the school improvement plan had positive effects on the climate of the school system.
5. The Parent and Community Survey that was conducted in 2006 showed that in general, parents have a positive attitude towards the education system, and feel that the schools perform well academically. The response rate however, is indicative of the challenges associated with parental involvement and engagement in the education system.
6. The Student Population Census provides useful information not only on the number of students living within the school district, but also insight into why some parents chose to send their children to schools in New York State. The data collected from the census will provide the Board of Education with student numbers to make future projections on enrolment,

as well as information on programming needs to not only retain current students, but to attract new students from the competing schools.

The school improvement measurements undertaken in this study show a clear disadvantage in assessing the success of students in First Nations schools. Relying on the standardised assessments promulgated by ministries of education as the sole indicator of student achievement and program success is shown not to be reliable given the context of the social, linguistic, political, cultural, and economic conditions of First Nations communities. Rather, these assessments provide a snapshot at one moment in time, and should be used by First Nations schools to plan and develop programs and make adjustments to the instructional practices in the schools that will ensure continuous school improvement. The variability in the results presented in this study suggest that there is no single quantitative schema for assessing school success or student achievement for First Nations schools when the comparator is the non-Native population in provincially funded and managed schools.

CHAPTER 7

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and assess a research-based comprehensive board-wide improvement plan in a First Nation school system over a three-year period. In addition to research based practices advocated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the plan included locally developed performance indicators to assess growth and student achievement between the 2006/2007 and 2008/2009 school years. The question posed in this study sought to find out if the plan would bring the First Nation school system to the provincial standard. Additionally, the study sought to determine if the school improvement plan would improve the perception of the school system held by community members.

This concluding chapter comprises five sections. In the first section, I provide a summary of the study, including a discussion on the process of change and its impact on the implementation of the improvement plan. In the second section, I discuss the conclusions based on the results of the study. In the third section, I provide a discussion of the implications of the study. In section four, I

discuss future research based on the outcomes of the present study, before providing a summary of my research-based recommendations in section five.

7.1 Summary of the Study

The conditions and context of First Nations students attending on-reserve schools is markedly different from the general population who attend provincially funded and managed school systems. The historical, political, and fiduciary relationship between First Nations and the federal government, due in large part to the inequity in funding levels for education, are just some of the challenges that First Nations struggle with in their attempt to provide their students with an education comparable to their provincial counterparts. The ability to appropriately and accurately assess the achievement of First Nation students in on-reserve schools has been greatly hindered by these conditions.

This study utilized two norm-referenced assessments. I reviewed the Ontario provincial EQAO Assessments in Grade 3 and 6, and the Canadian Test of Basic Skills in Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8 as indicators of student achievement and to assess the school improvement plan. Each assessment was administered during the months of May and June in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

A survey instrument on bullying was administered to students in the spring of 2006 and 2009. A parent and community survey on school quality was administered in the spring of 2006, and a student population census was carried out in 2007. Profiles of each school and one for the entire Board were compiled using existing inventories of data, which included demographic information about students and staff, as well as information on several locally developed indicators. Additional documentary evidence was collected in the meeting minutes and attendance at the bi-monthly School Principals' Meetings, reports prepared and submitted to the trustees of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, and various reports submitted annually to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

7.1.1 The Impact of Change

"People don't resist change, people resist being changed."

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional."

School improvement plans, particularly comprehensive school reform plans that entail changes in curriculum and teaching practices, are complex endeavours, and have implications on the working lives of the teachers involved.

To many people, change implies that something is wrong. This is particularly difficult for teachers, who have had success with their teaching methods in the past and who naturally assume that they will continue to have success with them in the future. Hargreaves (1994) posits that while school reform can improve the outcomes for students, it brings with it unintended consequences for the staff members of the school involved in implementing the change. He notes that "the real challenge of reform as a continuous process, though, is acknowledging that every solution has a problem" (p. 138).

At the onset of any change initiative, teachers lack the evidence that the proposed changes will be successful. Resistance and skepticism by teaching staff is expected and needs to be validated and considered as an integral part of the school improvement plan.

At the beginning of the 2005/06 school year, a PowerPoint presentation and discussion of the process of change was given at each of the three schools, as well as at a staff meeting of Board administrators and program supervisors, and at a meeting of the Board of Education. In addition to the components of the improvement plan being reviewed at the meeting, the process of change was discussed (Collerette, Schnieder, and Legris, 2003). The emotions and fears that staff would be going through were also validated. An analogy to the work of Kubler-Ross's (1997:1969) grieving process was presented, showing that the

stages of grief and mourning were similar to the loss associated with change in the workplace. Staff members were receptive, but few if any questions were asked regarding the implementation of the Saxon Math program or the guided reading program. Rather, questions revolved around the provincial assessments as well as the services for students with special needs. One staff member raised his / her concern over the use of the provincial assessments, and asked if the results would be used as part of his / her performance appraisal. Another staff member expressed concern for students with special needs and wondered if there would be accommodations for these students, or if they would be exempted from the assessments.

This study recognises that the comprehensive improvement plan was top-down in its approach, and although staff would continue to be consulted throughout its implementation, the core of the plan had already been developed prior to its announcement. This approach is typical of most school reform and improvement plans, and because of the large number of areas to be addressed, it was decided by the researcher to be the most effective method for this study. Indeed, naiveté and lack of experience may be more responsible for the selection of this method.

Fullan (2001) noted that top-down strategies are more appropriately aligned with utilising both top-down and bottom-up strategies for implementing

change effectively (pp. 111-112). Improvement in student achievement occurs through improvement in classroom instructional practices, rather than solely through changes in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and school organisation or management. Because of this, the development of school improvement plans requires the input and expertise of those who will be responsible with its implementation at the classroom level.

This did not happen at the outset of this improvement plan, and it is recognised that this was a design and implementation flaw. The lessons learned from the development and implementation of this board-wide school improvement plan have informed the researcher and are being rectified as the next three-year plan is currently being developed. An administrative Leadership Team has been set up with staff members who are directly involved in program implementation and who provide support to teachers at the classroom level.

Change came on many fronts. In addition to the curriculum and assessment practices that were implemented, the Board hired three new principals at the start of the 2006/07 school year. The hiring of three new principals came after one long term principal retired, and the remaining two principals were teachers who were in acting positions. The new principals were hired by a team that included three teachers, two Board Members, and two senior administrators of the Board. Despite this, there was much apprehension

and suspicion by staff members at the start of the new school year. This change in school leadership was a source of anxiety for teaching staff and contributed to a sense of uneasiness within the teaching ranks.

In addition to the change in school based leadership, new curriculum series, including guided reading and the Saxon Math program were implemented. Both of these new programs have taken several years for the teachers to gain both comfort and experience with their use.

The most significant change was the move to an inclusion model for special education students. The shift from a pull-out program, where students received services in a self-contained classroom, to one where students remained in the regular classroom, was the most difficult change for teachers to accept. Although a staff member was put into the role of Inclusive Service Program Facilitator, and designated to provide support to each classroom teacher, the transition was not smooth. Many teachers were uncomfortable with having students with special needs in their classroom full-time and wanted a special education teacher or assistant in their classroom. The need to make accommodations or modifications to the curriculum for these students, based on the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), and the need to differentiate instruction, is also an on-going challenge.

The numerous stressors associated with the implementation of the plan, and with beginning tenure of the researcher as the Director of Education, led many of the staff members to question their job security. The dismissal of two staff members, both teachers, caused a considerable amount of unrest among the teaching ranks that led to the discussion of forming or joining a union. The level of confidentiality surrounding the disciplining of and termination of personnel led many staff members to create their own versions of events and the reasons for dismissal. In short, the rumour mill ran rampant throughout the school board.

The climate within the schools reached fever levels of uncertainty and uneasiness that began to impact teaching and learning. In an attempt to ease the minds of staff and to provide clarity to the situation, school was dismissed early one afternoon and a board-wide staff meeting was held at one of the schools. All employees were in attendance, as well as members of the Board of Education and the Education Portfolio Holder of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. A review of the situation was presented and discussed, and a question and answer period allowed staff members to express their concerns or feelings, or to have questions answered in a formal setting. While specifics of the termination of the employee could not be answered, as confidentiality had to be protected, the meeting was an opportunity for staff members to express their concerns and to have some of their questions answered. It also gave the Board

of Education the opportunity to show that the procedures for termination were followed in accordance with the statutes of the Canada Labour Code.

Given the number of changes that had occurred within the Board, the formation of a union proved inevitable. On June 22, 2007, the Board of Education received notification from the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) that the staff members of AMBE had applied for certification as a union. In January of 2008, a vote was held within the Board and the staff members voted overwhelmingly in favour of unionisation. Negotiations on a contract began in August of 2008, and ratification of the contract occurred in June of 2009.

The majority of the articles in the contract mirror those in the AMBE Policy Handbook that had been in place since 1997, all of which were in conformity with the Canada Labour Code. The salary grid that the teachers adopted was submitted by the Board of Education, and included several new education and experience level categories. Preparation time, work hours, leaves, and general working conditions were consistent with policies and procedures already in place. However, the contract put all of these conditions in one document and gave the teachers a sense of protection, as well as security and stability within the work place. This can be seen as a positive outcome of the entire process, and has contributed to stabilising the climate and atmosphere within the three schools.

However, that sense of stability came with a price on the part of the staff, as membership in PSAC comes at a cost of .015% of each employee's salary.

7.2 Conclusions

The core question to be answered in this study was "Will the development and implementation of a comprehensive school improvement plan, following a research-based model and the development of locally based indicators, bring a First Nation school board to the provincial standard, as well as improve the perception of its schools as held by community members?" The core question is therefore broken into two parts: 1) Will the comprehensive school improvement plan bring the First Nations school board to the provincial standard; and 2) Will the comprehensive school improvement plan improve the perception of its schools as held by community members? The two responses provide a context for a larger discussion leading toward recommendations for further research.

7.2.1 Question Part 1 Discussion

The first part of the question, of bringing the First Nation school board to the provincial standard, entailed developing and implementing a comprehensive improvement plan over a three-year period. To assess the plan and to determine

its effectiveness, the results of two norm-referenced student assessments were used: the Ontario EQAO assessments in Grade 3 and 6, and the CTBS assessments in Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8. Primary data for this study were collected for the each of the assessments in the spring of 2007, 2008, and 2009.

The results from the provincial assessments over the three-year period showed that the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education did not meet the provincial standard for either Grade 3 or Grade 6 in any of the assessed areas of reading, writing, or mathematics. The most significant amount of growth for both Grade 3 and Grade 6 occurred between Year 1 and Year 2 in the area of writing. However, all of these gains were lost in Year 3, when a political conflict in the community closed the schools for three days during the last week of the provincial assessments, and then led to the reconfiguration of the schools.

The growth from the 2007 to the 2008 administration of the EQAO assessments was quite promising, and gave the administrative team of the Board quite a bit of optimism for the third administration in 2009. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, events in the community that led to the closure of the schools for several days during the administration of the assessments, and then the reconfiguration of the schools at the end of the school year, had a definite impact on the final results. These events, while extraordinary to outsiders, form the political context that many First Nations experience as part of their “lived

experience" on a reserve. Certainly this was the case for the residents of Akwesasne, who over the years have experienced tumultuous and difficult times, including the closure of all access roads to the reserve for several months during the gambling conflict of 1990 (see Johansen, Bruce E., 1993, Life & Death in Mohawk Country, for a detailed description of events).

Although data were only collected over a three-year period for this study, the development of the board-wide improvement plan extended over a five-year span, beginning with its inception in 2005, and concluding at the end of the school year in 2010. The relatively short time-frame to assess a comprehensive board-wide improvement plan for this study may have been unrealistic. Equally ambitious was the attempt to bring the school board to the provincial standard in just three years.

Under the education devolution agreements signed by First Nations when they took management and control over their schools, was the provision that they provide an education comparable to the province. The results from this study also bring into question whether it is reasonable to expect a First Nation school board to meet the standards set by the province and to show comparable student achievement in the assessments, given the inequity in funding and the lack of support services available.

For both Grade 3 and Grade 6 students, achievement in reading lags far behind the provincial standard on the EQAO assessments. This is also the case when looking at the results of comparator schools, as the reading levels for AMBE students fall considerably below the mean of these schools. To address the low reading level, the Board of Education has implemented a new reading series from the publisher Nelson Education Ltd., which is aligned to the Ontario curriculum. The implementation of the series includes Grades 3 to 8, and will be expanded to Grades 1 and 2 for the 2010/11 school year.

The establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in schools is seen as an effective manner for improving instructional practice in the classroom (Schmoker, 2006, p. 106). It is what Elmore (2007) calls the "privacy of practice" that is the real enemy of improvement, as teaching is inherently isolationist in nature, and it is this isolation that "is the enemy of improvement" (p. 67).

To address the isolationist paradigm, and to establish PLCs within the Board, the focus of the 2008/09 school year was the book Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern, 2002). A full-day professional development workshop was set aside in October of 2008 to introduce the book. A presenter from the State University of New York at Potsdam, certified as a Circle of Courage presenter, introduced the staff to the

model designed on Native American principles of child-rearing practices which is then extended to classroom management practices. The model uses the medicine wheel as the core, and is used to create an atmosphere in the classroom where all of the needs of students are met. Teachers, instructional support staff, board administrators, and school board members read the book throughout the school year using the PLC format, during staff meetings and on half-day professional development workshops. The book has become a component of the new teacher mentor program, ensuring that all staff members are able to reference and use the model in their classroom practice.

7.2.2 Question Part 2 Discussion

The second part of the question, of improving the perception of the school system held by community members, entailed conducting and analysing both student and community surveys. For example, a student bullying instrument was administered during the spring of 2006 and then again in 2009. The results of the survey indicated that bullying and bullying behaviours in the schools decreased significantly between the first administrations of the survey in 2006 to the second administration of the survey in 2009. Student responses to feeling positive about their safety and security at school increased from 36% to 55%, a strong indication of a positive perception of the school system by the students.

In 2006, a twenty-question parent and community questionnaire was administered at each school's Open House Night and during the Board's annual community night. The results of the survey indicated that parents and community members had, in general, a positive perception of the school system, although a few areas were in need of improvement. A second follow-up survey was scheduled for the spring of 2009. However, the conflict in the community over the arming of CBSA caused considerable unrest and uncertainty in the community, all of which led to the closure of the international border and the reconfiguration of the schools. This unrest in the community did not allow for a second administration and thus a comparison of the two surveys was not possible.

Although a second parent and community survey was not conducted, the 2007 Student Population Survey offers valuable data and insightful information regarding the community's perception of the Board of Education. The unique geographic location of Akwesasne provides parents with the opportunity to make numerous school choices for their children. They have the option of enrolling their children in five elementary schools on-reserve, two different school districts in New York State who offer both elementary and high schools, or in three high schools in Cornwall, Ontario. With these options available to them, nearly two-thirds of the students residing within the jurisdiction of the Board of Education are

attending an AMBE district or supported school. The percentage of eligible students attending a district school in two of the districts is 70% or greater, with only one district reporting just over 50%.

7.3 Implications

The greatest challenge for the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education is one of parental choice. Due to the unique geography of the area, parents have numerous options not found in other communities. Attracting and retaining students is an on-going challenge, and comparisons are constantly made between the Board of Education and the surrounding schools. The Breakfast Program, Latch Key Program, and occupational therapy services, as well as music, art, and computer technology classes were developed and offered because the schools in New York State offer these programs and classes. The one area that the Board of Education has not been able to offer comparable services in is in the area of special education. Students identified with special needs in New York State receive numerous services that cannot be matched in the federally funded on-reserve school system. While the Board of Education has moved towards an inclusion model for special education, the services and personnel that are offered are minimal in comparison.

The school improvement plan yielded many new programs and initiatives within the Board of Education, all of which have had positive implications for the future operations of the Board of Education. These programs, services, and initiatives offered to the students of the Board can be seen as positive outcomes of the plan and indicators of success.

These identified indicators of success are listed as follows:

1. The Early Years Program – each school houses a Head Start, K4, and K5 program. The program includes a uniform curriculum, a low teacher-pupil ratio, and is overseen by the Early Years Facilitator.
2. Skahwatsi:ra Program – "One family, One nation." The former Mohawk Language Immersion Program now comprises K4 to Grade 4 for a more comprehensive program with a focus on oral language fluency. Performance indicators and assessments have been developed to assess language acquisition. The CAN8 Virtual Language Learning Lab has been developed with AMBE curriculum and teacher input. The Board has 30 licenses and is accessed via the MCA network. The Kanien'kéha program is overseen by the Kanien'kéha Curriculum Specialist, who provides curricular and classroom support to both the Skahwatsi:ra Program and the Core Mohawk Language Program.

3. Mohawk Language Transition Program – a Grade 5/6 transition program for students coming from the Skahwatsi:ra Program has been set up at AMS. The program has a low teacher-pupil ratio and offers intensive language and literacy support for students transitioning from the Skahwatsi:ra Program to the English language program. The students are also grouped together in a Mohawk Language Maintenance core class, taught at an advanced level in an effort to allow students to retain the oral language skills that they had attained in the Skahwatsi:ra Program.
4. Food Services – a free breakfast program, funded by the National Childhood Benefit Reinvestment Fund was implemented in 2006. Every student receives a free breakfast, and lunches are subsidized by the program at a free or reduced rate. A lunch card and billing system was also implemented in 2008.
5. Inclusive Services Program – an inclusion model for students identified with special needs was introduced in 2006 and has slowly developed and grown since that time. Students are no longer assigned to self contained classrooms, but remain in the classroom and receive services by special education teachers and educational assistants, who provide support to the classroom teacher. Building Level Teams (BLT) have been established, and Individual Education Plans (IEP) use a uniform format. An Inclusive

Services Facilitator was assigned to oversee the program and provides teacher support at all three schools. The program continues to develop to meet the needs of both students and staff.

6. Technology – each school has been equipped with new computers over the past three years. Each school has a mobile SmartBoard, and a stationary SmartBoard is being installed in each school computer lab. Each teacher received a desk top computer connected to the internet, and each was assigned an e-mail account. An electronic grade-book was piloted, which allows parents to access their child's grades on-line. Assistive technology for students with special needs has been implemented, and includes Kurzweil, SpeakQ, and WordQ. A Technology Team has been convened and will develop a long range technology plan for AMBE that will address infrastructure, software, and professional development and training.
7. Standardized Assessments – the Board began participating in the Ontario EQAO assessments in 2007. The Canadian Achievement Test (CAT4) replaced the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) for the 2009/10 school year. These assessments provide the teachers and the school administrators with information on student achievement progress in relation to the provincial and national norms.

8. Formative Assessments – AMBE introduced several formative assessments for teachers to use as diagnostic and planning instruments. These include writing prompts, running records, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA).
9. Saxon Math – the Saxon Math program is fully implemented in all three schools, including the Skahwatsi:ra Program, from Kindergarten to Grade 8.
10. Safety and Security – all three schools have been equipped with lock-out entry systems, as well as an internal and external camera system. This technology allows the school principal to monitor entry to the school, and conforms to the Safe School Policy that was developed with the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Services in 2007.
11. Transportation – AMBE has continued to update the bus fleet, with five new C2 buses purchased in 2006, and replacements annually. The intermediate and high school buses have camera systems installed, and all new buses purchased will also include a camera system. Three buses were designated for the Early Years Program, transporting only students at the Head Start, K4, and K5 level.

12. Public Service Alliance Canada (PSAC) Contract – the teachers received certification from PSAC in 2007 and negotiated a contract for teachers and instructional support personnel in 2009. The contract details working conditions and addresses both employer and employee rights and responsibilities.
13. Teacher Certification Initiative – at the start of the 2005/06 school year, the Board undertook an initiative to have all teaching staff certified. The certification rate at the start of the initiative was 77%. By the end of the 2008/09 school year, the rate had increased to 98%, with 100% of the staff anticipated to hold certification at the start of the 2010/11 school year;
14. School Environment – the school environment, under the daily leadership of the school principals, and through the vision of the Board of Education, has shown considerable positive growth during the implementation of the Comprehensive Improvement Plan. The school climate, as perceived by students and parents in two survey instruments, appears to be positive.
15. Data Collection and Data Management – the Board has begun to collect varied data on student achievement, as well as demographic data on both students and teachers. The storage and access to this data will prove useful to the staff of the Board of Education, as well as to future researchers interested in conducting studies in the community. To

facilitate this, the Board of Education has received funding from INAC to purchase a student data management system under the federally funded First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP).

16. Student Retention – declining enrolment in the AMBE school system has been a concern to the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne for several years, as the core budget for education that is negotiated for the multi-year agreement is based on the Nominal Roll numbers submitted to INAC. When enrolment drops, the ability of Council to negotiate for education diminishes. However, during the period of study, enrolment within the three AMBE schools remained steady, with a range of 508 to 524 students, inclusive of Head Start students.

The findings in this study provide the Board of Education with a direction and road map to continue the process and to keep the school system on the path of continuous and sustained improvement.

In 2009, the Board of Education received approval from INAC for funding over a three-year period to support the school improvement process through the First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP). The funding will be used to purchase a student data management system to house information on students from entry in the school system at Head Start through to their attendance in a

post secondary institution. The data system will record attendance, student achievement, retention, graduation, and post secondary assistance, among other areas.

The FNSSP will also fund the implementation of a three-year school success plan in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The Board of Education has engaged the services of the Success for All Foundation, a comprehensive school reform program that will implement an early learning program for reading in the K4 and K5 classrooms, and an adolescent reading program for Grades 7 and 8. The Foundation will also provide consulting services for Grades 1 to 6 in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education was one of only six First Nations in Ontario to receive approval for the funding. The Comprehensive School Improvement Plan utilized in this study formed the basis of the proposal to position the Board as capable of carrying out such an endeavour. As the Board of Education moves forward with a new plan, the lessons learned from this research study will form the basis of the direction that the Board will take.

7.4 Future Research

Additional research in the area of First Nations educational reform and the development of models to assess student success is warranted. However, as noted previously, the question as to the appropriateness of attempting to bring a First Nation school board to the provincial standard needs to be re-evaluated. The inequity in funding and the lack of support services, as well as the ability of many First Nations in Canada to carry out such work, should be taken into consideration.

The three-year time-frame of this study may have had an impact on the ability of the researcher to assess the outcomes, particularly on the standardised assessments. The contextual variables of living in a First Nation community were not considered at the outset of this study, and the impacts in the last year were not foreseen. It is anticipated that an additional year of data collection may compensate for those circumstances.

The creation of locally based performance indicators and assessments that take into consideration the unique characteristics of the First Nation community is an area of research that needs to be fully investigated. These performance indicators should include, but are not limited to: oral fluency in the First Nation language, comprehension and understanding of the First Nation

language, knowledge of First Nation based cultural practices and protocols, the skill and ability to carry out and perform cultural practices and protocols (i.e., ceremonies, public speaking, singing and dancing, etc.), and land based or experiential based practices. The performance indicators must be accompanied by a requisite assessment instrument or model that accurately measures levels of performance and allows the First Nation to monitor and report on student achievement and progress.

7.5 Summary

This chapter reviewed the findings and conclusions of the study, and discussed how the process of change impacted the implementation of the comprehensive board-wide improvement plan. The implications of the study were briefly discussed, with a focus on the positive indicators of success of the plan, such as the development of numerous programs in the school system. Future research in the area of student achievement in First Nations schools was discussed, and the appropriateness of comparing First Nation students to their provincial counterparts was questioned.

Three key recommendations based on the outcomes of the study will be presented here. These recommendations are aimed towards administrators and

leaders within First Nations schools in Canada, who are tasked with the challenge of preparing their students to succeed in both their home community and the society at large. Larry Lazore, one of Akwesasne's earliest teachers, spoke of the education system needing to provide Native children with a 200% education. He believed that the education system should provide children with the tools needed to not only survive, but to thrive in both worlds. These recommendations consider Lazore's challenge.

7.6 Recommendations

1. **Leadership and Capacity Development:** First Nations need to develop the capacity to effectively manage and evaluate the operation of their school systems. This can be accomplished through the creation of local school boards that operate with a high degree of autonomy from the local band council, in an effort to separate the politics of the community from the education system. The areas of autonomy need to include hiring and recruitment, curriculum, school-based management and operations, and more oversight of the band council approved budget. Capacity development also needs to occur at the board member level, with training on policy governance and the role and duties of school trustees.

2. **Assessment Practices**: First Nations need to develop local performance indicators to measure student success, in addition to the norm-referenced assessments such as standardised tests. The locally-based performance indicators should measure indigenous language and literacies, cultural practices and customs, and community engagement indicators. The use of standardised assessments must be used in unison with these locally-based performance indicators and should be viewed not as summative, but rather formative in nature, and as opportunities to indicate areas for improvement.
3. **Early Learning**: Early learning programs must be considered as the foundation of each First Nation school, with educated and experienced teachers as the core teaching staff. These programs can begin with three-year olds in the Aboriginal Head Start Programs, and should continue to at least the kindergarten level. Indigenous languages, cultural practices, health, patterning, and early literacy should be the focus of these programs. These programs need constant evaluation to keep pace with social, economic, political, environmental and medical changes in the global context that can act as a barrier to quality education.

The school system is the main avenue for the cultural transmission of language, customs, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. The school system can prepare its students to become active and informed citizens. When the system is underfunded and not adequately managed or supported, it fails both the students and society. For First Nations students, the failure of their schools has impacted both the local First Nation culture and Canada as a whole. Ensuring that First Nations students receive the highest quality education possible so that they receive a 200% education requires a commitment from both the federal government and from the First Nations themselves. Assessing the quality and effectiveness of on-reserve schools is a continuous process that must be developed with the input of First Nations in the development of locally based performance indicators. All of this is possible, indeed imperative, if First Nations are to guide their own way into the seventh generation.

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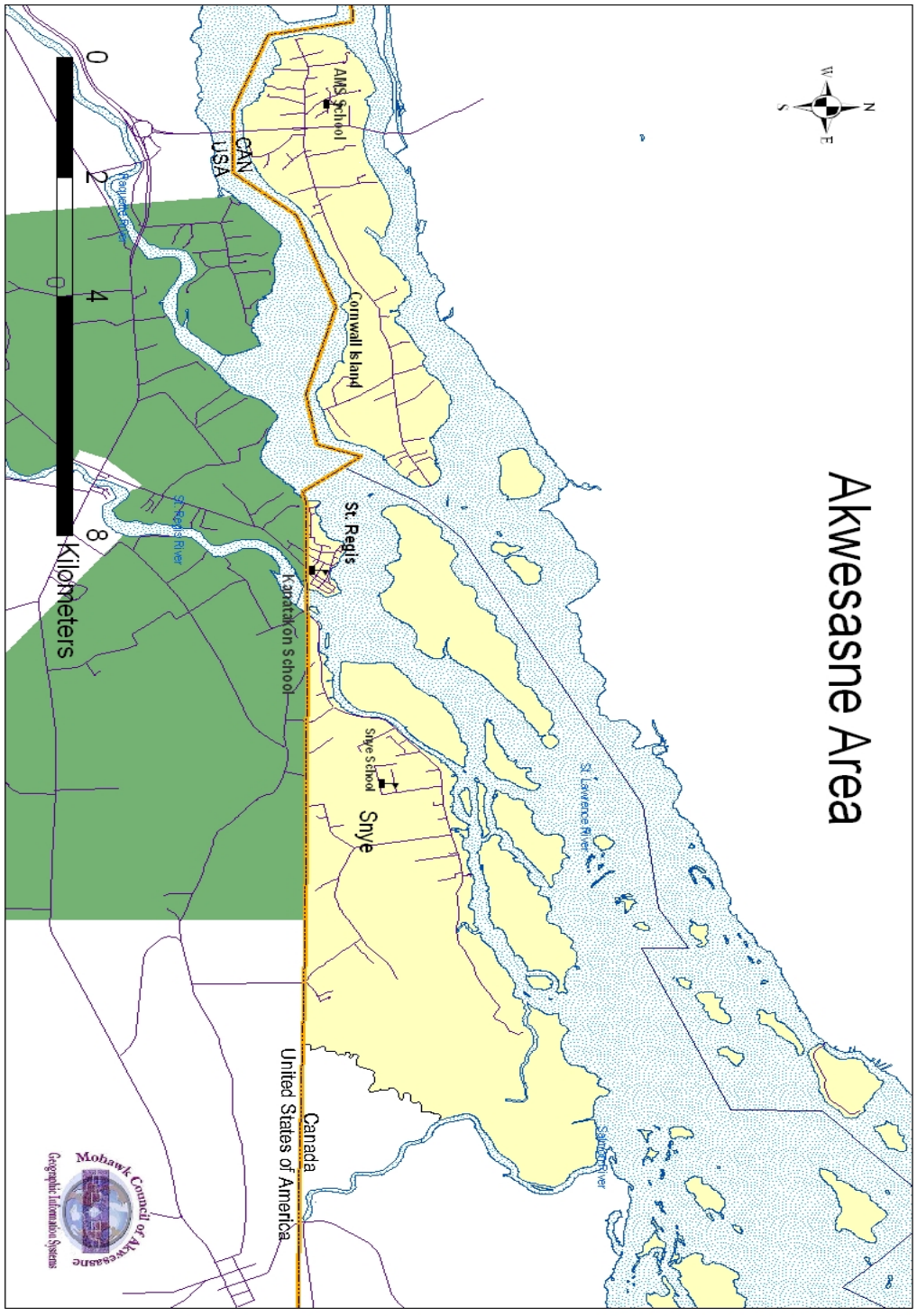
APPENDIX 1

Map of Akwesasne



APPENDIX 2

Letter of Permission

Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education
P.O. Box 819, Cornwall, Ontario K6H 5T7
Tel: (613) 933-0409 Fax: (613) 933-9262

5 September 2006

Michael Doxtater, Ph. D.
Indigenous Studies in Education, Research, and Teaching
213 Faculty of Education
McGill University
Montreal, PQ H3A 1Y2

Wa'tkwanonhwera:ton / Greetings Michael,

On behalf of the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education, I am writing to formally indicate our awareness of the research proposed by Barry M. Montour, a Ph. D. student at McGill University in the Department Integrated Studies in Education.

We are aware that Barry M. Montour intends to conduct his research by collecting, administering, and analysing various data, including but not limited to: student achievement, test scores, attendance reports, report card data, meeting minutes, and survey instruments, among others.

As an elected trustee of the Board of Education within the jurisdiction of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, and the duly elected Chair of the Board, on behalf of the entire Board, I grant permission to Barry M. Montour to conduct his research in our school system. We support his research and look forward to the report that he will be compiling.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Board Office at (613) 933-0409.

Sken:nen / Peace,

Barbara Barnes

Barbara Barnes, Chair
Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education

APPENDIX 3

Bullying Survey

AMBE SAFE SCHOOLS REVIEW

Student Survey

This short survey will help your school staff address the issue of Bullying in our schools. Please answer the following questions:

School: **AMS** **Kana:takon** **Grade: _____** **Gender: M F**

1. What is bullying?

   _____

   _____

2. Have you ever been bullied? (You can check more than one box.)

Type	**Check**	**Such as . . . . . .**
Physically?		I was hit, pushed, slapped, spat on . . .
Verbally?		I was teased, mean things were said to me, I was called names, I was threatened . . . . .
Socially?		I was excluded, ignored, had rumours spread about me to others, others were made not to like me . . . .
Written?		Others wrote threats and bad things about me at school, on-line, ...
Property?		Things were taken from me, my things were damaged, ...
Other?		Describe:

3. **Who was the bully?** **Someone older ___** **Someone my age _____**
4. **Did you tell anyone about the bullying?** **YES ___** **NO ___**
5. **At my school, I think that:**

1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Lots of bullying takes place, on one does anything about it. I do not feel safe.	**Sometimes bullying happens, someone might do something about it. I feel a little safe.**	**Bullying hardly ever happens, but it is usually dealt with, so I feel pretty safe**	**Bullying rarely if ever happens because it is not acceptable here. I feel very safe.**

APPENDIX 4

Parent Questionnaire

District Evaluation – 2006

Please complete this form for your family if you have one or more children currently enrolled in an AMBE school or program. You may be asked to fill out more than one questionnaire if your children attend more than one AMBE school.

Circle one:

My child is in grade: Head Start K4 K5 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

School: **Tsi Snaihne** **AMS** **Kana:takon School**

Please check the number that corresponds to your feelings about each question.

1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

Question	1	2	3	4	5
My child is happy at school and usually wants to be there.					
I feel welcome at my child's school.					
I am informed about my child's progress.					
I know what my child's teacher expects of my child.					
My child is safe at school.					
I know how well my child is progressing in school.					
I like the school's report card/progress reports.					
I respect the school's teachers.					
I respect the school's principal.					
Overall, the school performs well academically.					
The school prepares the children for the future.					
The school has a good public image.					
The school's assessment practices are fair.					
My child's teacher helps me to help my child at home.					
I support my child's learning at home.					
My child's teacher contacts me regularly, not just when there is a problem.					
My school board representatives are helpful when I have questions about the school.					
My child has the opportunity to go on worthwhile field trips.					
I believe the staff at the school respect parents/community.					
School activities/students' achievements are published in the local media.					