Mi'kmaq Students with Special Education Needs in Nova Scotia

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with the assistance of
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for Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey
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"In aboriginal societies, as in many societies, children are regarded as a precious gift. Control over the education of their children has been a pressing priority of Aboriginal people for decades. This is not surprising. The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people." (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, vol. 3, chapter 5.)

Acknowledgements

A study such as the one we have undertaken draws on the time, talent and resources of a large number of persons. We gratefully acknowledge their contribution here.

We have worked closely with Marjorie Gould and John Jerome Paul from Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. Both have given strong support and guidance for this study. In addition, we have met many times with the education directors from the various school districts that comprise the jurisdiction of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. As a group, the education directors and its Special Education Sub-committee advised on all phases of the study, from design through to implementation and recommendations. Individually, the education directors facilitated the gathering of the data within their geographic area.

Overall, for the empirical part of this study, we collected information from 56 schools across the province, located both on and off-reserve. We are very grateful to the principals for giving permission for the data collection and to the school personnel – guidance counsellors, teachers, special education resource personnel – who completed the forms for the Mi'kmaq students attending their school. For some, it was just a few forms to be completed but for others it amounted to several hundred, and represented an enormous effort at a time when the school year was winding down.

For provincial schools, our work was greatly facilitated by school board personnel who gave their consent for the completion of the study.

The persons who actually organized and supervised the data collection were Jean Knockwood from Indian Brook and Virick Francis from Waycobah. They did an excellent, careful job, and their dedication is evident from the fact that the data collection forms were completed for over 97 per cent of the students on the nominal roll of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. Virick Francis continued his work into the data cleaning stage, undertaking to enter the information from all the forms into a computerized data base. Allison Beardsworth, a First Nation student in the BSW Program at the Maritime School of Social Work, assisted in the further preparation of the data for analysis.

Other individuals and organizations gave us access to information about their policies, practices and research. In particular, we are grateful to the First Nations Education Council of Quebec (FNEC) and to the Assembly of First Nations Education Sector for generously giving their permission to include in our appendices two studies on the funding of special education.

Special acknowledgement is given to Isabelle Knockwood for her moving portrayal of life at the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie in her book, *Out of the Depths.*

About the Authors

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Isabel den Heyer has been primarily responsible for the research and writing in Sections I , II and III of this report, and for the design of the data collection instruments and related documents contained in the Appendices. Fred Wien has been primarily responsible for the data collection, analysis and writing reflected in Section IV, as well as the writing of Section V and the production of the final report as a whole.

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Preamble

Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia have long recognized the need to improve the quality of programming and services for their children with special needs. With the formation of a central education organization in 1992, later to be called Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, and the return of the jurisdiction for education in 1999, Mi'kmaq educators have the jurisdiction and organization necessary to begin the task of improving the quality of programming and services for students with special needs. To do so, however, they need to collect a solid information base, develop a policy framework and guidelines for dealing with special education needs, and obtain the funding that is required.

As the federal government of Canada does not have an adequate national special education policy, steps have been taken by First Nation organizations at the national level to address the situation. The Chiefs in Assembly passed resolutions in 1998 and 1999, which mandated the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to work with the federal government:

- to assess the issue of special education among First Nations
- to develop, ratify and implement a national First Nation special education policy framework; and
- to adopt a permanent and adequate fiscal resource base to address the requirements of First Nation students with special needs.

The First Nations Education Council of Quebec (FNEC) was in turn mandated by the AFN Executive Committee to take a lead role in developing a national special education policy framework and funding arrangement for special education (see Assembly of First Nations, 2000).

Work plans were designed to develop and implement a national communication strategy, a permanent funding mechanism for special education, a National First Nations Special Education Policy Framework, and policies at regional and community levels.

In 1999, M-K Directors of Education in Nova Scotia determined that more data and background information was required on the types, prevalence and severity of special needs in their communities to assist in their policy and funding formula development. They commissioned this study to provide that information as a step toward ensuring that all students covered under the Mi'knaw Kina'matnewey (M-K) Agreement have the opportunity to develop to their maximum potential by having access to a quality education that includes adequate facilities and resources, and appropriately trained teachers.

The study we have undertaken at the request of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey has four components:

- a review of the literature on special education, with particular reference to First Nations

- an examination of different models or policy approaches to special education in Canada, and to the funding of programs and services

- an extensive empirical study of the types, prevalence and severity of special education needs among the Mi'kmaq student body. The study includes students from kindergarten to Grade 12 who live on one of the nine reserves covered by the M-K Agreement. They may be attending school either on or off reserve

- a set of recommendations based on the information base that has been collected

A Word on Terminology

In this study, the terms *special needs*, *special education needs* and *additional education needs* are used to describe the education needs of students that teachers see as being in addition to the expected needs of a student of that age.

In the traditional sense, the term *special needs* applies to students with disorders, disabilities and health impairments. These needs are almost always medically diagnosed and may require a variety of

medically related and education interventions. Over time the term came to include students who were gifted as they were seen to require specific intervention to meet their unique needs.

The term *special education needs* narrows the term to apply to special needs that can be addressed in an education system with linkages to agencies outside of the school.

The term *additional education needs* includes students with special needs, special education needs and those with social and environmentally-determined needs that place them at risk for school failure. Students in the latter group would not traditionally be considered students with special needs.

We use these terms somewhat interchangeably, although we do try to be clear on what kinds of special or additional education needs we are referring to in different parts of the report. The use of these terms in this study reflects the evolving nature of programming and services for students in communities that are attempting to be inclusive, viewing students in a holistic manner, as is the case in Aboriginal communities.

Executive Summary

1. Purpose of the Study

This study was commissioned by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, the education authority for 9 of the 13 Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia. It serves some 2400 students who are living on reserve and who are attending school both on and off reserve.

The purpose of the study is to provide information on the types, severity and prevalence of special education needs among First Nation students under the Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey Agreement. It also includes a review of the literature on special education needs among First Nations in Canada, and an analysis of how Nova Scotia and other provinces establish the number and types of special needs in their student populations, and how they determine the funding formula presently in effect. This information should assist Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in developing policy and funding arrangements that would ensure all Mi'kmaq students have the education opportunities they require to reach their full academic potential.

2. Historical Background

In the twentieth century, formal education for Mi'kmaq children has been provided in a number of different ways. From 1929 through to the 1960's, for example, many Mi'kmaq students received their education at the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie. Students have also attended boarding schools off reserve in other locations, federal schools on reserve, or provincial schools in neighbouring communities under agreement with provincial school boards. In the past two decades, the trend has been toward building schools on reserve where numbers warrant. Indeed, about three-quarters of M-K's student body is currently going to school on reserve while the remainder are in nearby provincial schools.

Until the 1970's, many Mi'kmaq students with identified special needs remained at home in the care of their families. Some were placed in provincial institutions for persons with specific

disabilities, such as the facility for the blind in Halifax. This pattern was consistent with practices in other communities in Nova Scotia.

Since the 1970's, in Nova Scotia and elsewhere, there has been a movement away from segregated education for students with special needs to integrating them in the regular classroom. The more inclusive, contemporary model not only seeks to integrate the student into the regular classroom, but also gives responsibility for educating the student to the classroom teacher in cooperation with special education resource persons, avoiding as much as possible the practice of pulling the student out of class for special attention by the special education teachers.

3. Existing Guidelines for First Nation Special Education

DIAND has developed a set of guidelines for funding First Nation special education, but they are inadequate and out of date. In particular, they have been criticized for:

- being administratively burdensome
- being based on an outdated concept of disabilities, one that assumes children who are physically challenged are also intellectually challenged and cannot function in a regular classroom
- being based on an outdated service delivery model. This model assumes that segregated schools are the answer for those who are physically challenged with high cost needs
- not providing a mechanism to take into account the large number of students with low cost (mild to moderate) special education needs, and the interventions and supports they require
- mandating the use of standardized assessments if schools are to receive funding for students with high cost needs. Yet, these assessment tools are often culturally biased and inappropriate for First Nation conditions
- assuming that categories of special needs are the same in all jurisdictions across Canada
- ignoring the underlying issues of poverty, unemployment and poor health in First Nation communities that contribute to the high prevalence of students with special education needs.

The shortcomings of the present guidelines underline the need for the development of a new, comprehensive, special education policy framework for First Nations. Indeed work in this direction is underway at the national level, and this study is part of the same process within Nova Scotia.

4. Policy Development and Funding Models

As M-K goes about the task of developing its approach to special education, it is useful to look at what other models exist. The advantages and disadvantages of two other models are discussed:

(a) **The Nova Scotia Approach**. The Nova Scotia Special Education Policy Manual offers a non-categorical approach to educating students with special needs. The Nova Scotia approach has the advantage of spending less money than the categorical approach on the testing and assessment of students. Its emphasis is on putting scarce resources into the task of meeting the special education needs of the students. If M-K chooses to follow this approach, there would be a good fit between the Mi'kmaq system and the provincial system, an important consideration when some Mi'kmaq students attend provincial schools and there is transfer from one system to the other. However, there may well be policies and procedures that are not consistent with Mi'kmaq culture, traditions, and conditions. In addition, the census-based funding formula used by Nova Scotia may not be sufficiently responsive to the needs of high cost students in small communities, nor adequately take into account the high number of Mi'kmaq students in the low cost category.

(b) **The First Nation Education Council of Quebec Approach**. The FNEC favours a categorical approach, which is consistent with the policy followed by the Province of Quebec and by DIAND. However, it would not be compatible with the approach taken by the Province of Nova Scotia. It is also expensive and

difficult to administer because so much emphasis is placed on undertaking individualized assessments for the purpose of placing students into categories.

Our report also discusses six models for funding special education, drawing from the practices of the provinces across the country. They are: the flat grant, pupil weighting, census-based funding, resource-based funding, percentage reimbursement, and a hybrid model.

5. The Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Special Needs Study

The main purpose of the data collection phase of this study was to determine the number and proportion of Mi'kmaq children within the M-K system who had special education needs, and the nature of those needs. Our approach was to develop a 2-page form that was completed in the late spring of the year 2000 for each of the M-K children, whether they were attending school on or off reserve. However, all the students were living on reserve. The grades covered were kindergarten through grade 12, and the forms were completed by personnel within each of the schools – usually the home room teacher, the guidance counsellor, a special education resource teacher, or some combination of the above.

The proportion of forms completed was extremely high, numbering 2,310 completed forms out of a nominal roll list of 2,374 M-K students. All nine Mi'kmaq communities who have signed the M-K Agreement are represented, although the large size of Eskasoni means that almost half the students in the study are from this community (Chart 1).

The full report contains some 50 charts and tables, but among the major findings of the study are the following:

- Just over three-quarters of the M-K children and youth are attending schools located on the reserve (Chart 2)

- A third of the students are described as having Mi'kmaq as their first language, with virtually all of the remainder having English as their first language (Chart 5).

- According to the persons completing the forms, 53 per cent of the Mi'kmaq students (1209 students out of 2280) have additional education needs (Chart 6). Of all the M-K students, 16 per cent are described as having additional education needs that are minor in severity, 22 per cent are moderate and 12 per cent are extensive (Chart 11).

- If students with only minor additional education needs are excluded, the percentage of the M-K student body with additional education needs (moderate and severe) drops from just over 50 per cent to 35 per cent (Chart 11).

- The proportion of Mi'kmaq students with additional education needs is higher in schools off reserve than on reserve (Chart 7), and is also higher for males than females (Chart 10).

- The percentage of students with additional education needs stands at 31 per cent in the kindergarten and primary grades, but quickly jumps to the 55 to 60 per cent range from the early years of elementary school through to Grade 12 (Chart 8).

- The proportion with more extensive needs is higher in off-reserve schools than on-reserve (Chart 12), and among male students more so than female students (Chart 14).

- The large majority of the students with additional education needs (1068 out of 1209) is described as having a disability, disorder or health impairment, or being gifted (Chart 15).

- Of the 1068 students who are described as having a disability, disorder, or health impairment, or to be gifted, only about 20 per cent (212 students) have been professionally diagnosed by personnel such as a doctor, a psychologist or speech language pathologist (Chart 16). School personnel have identified the remainder (Chart 18).

- Almost half of the 1068 students (47 per cent) are said to have a learning disability. Another 23 per cent have emotional/behavioural impairments, followed by speech or communication disorders (11 per cent) and cognitive impairments (9 per cent) (Chart 19).

- Students who are said to have learning disabilities are having problems particularly with basic reading skills, reading comprehension, and written expression (Chart 22).

- Those who are said to have emotional/behavioural impairments are suffering from conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity, and attention deficit disorders (Chart 21).

- Those with cognitive impairments typically have "developmental delay" and fetal alcohol syndrome/effects (Chart 20).

- As these results indicate, however, most of the special education problems faced by Mi'kmaq children are not the stereotype problems of physical or intellectual handicaps. Rather, they have to do with learning problems, particularly with reading and writing, and emotional/behavioural problems.

- About a quarter of the M-K students are at risk of school failure. Of the 2310 students for whom forms were completed, 602 students or 26 per cent are described as being at risk of school failure (Chart 39).

- The most common reasons given for being at risk of failure are poor attendance, lack of motivation, behaviour problems, instability in the family, lack of family support, academic deficits, and student health problems (Chart 40). Those completing the forms, that is, school-based personnel, seldom identified the problem as having its roots in the school failing to meet the students' needs.

- It is difficult to find comparable data from other jurisdictions, either because research has not been carried out or because research methodologies differ. However, it appears that among the mainstream student population in North America, the percentage of students with special education needs is in the order of 10-15 per cent. The Province of Nova Scotia does not have good data on the subject, but one source says that 17% of students in

the public school system are receiving support services from resource teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, teacher assistants and others.

- A review of other studies suggests that the percentage of students with special education needs among Aboriginal populations is typically two to three times higher than it is for mainstream student populations. The results of our study are consistent with this finding.

The study concludes with recommendations to the effect that[1] :

- Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey develop a comprehensive and culturally appropriate special education policy

- M-K undertake a study to determine the specific funding requirements and the funding formula that will best serve to meet the special education needs of Mi'kmaq students

- DIAND provide an increased level of funding for special needs education so that M-K can meet its legislated obligations. This is required because the funds available for special education for M-K students is less than the province makes available for its students, yet the proportion of M-K students with special education needs is much higher. This is in a context where Nova Scotia's total expenditures for public school education per capita is among the lowest in the country

- M-K should commission a study of best practices to provide guidance on the kinds of interventions that would prevent the development or address the special learning needs of Mi'kmaq children

- In developing a special education policy framework, M-K should emphasize early identification and intervention for children with disorders, disabilities and health impairments

[1] Please see Section 5 for the detailed wording of the recommendations.

- The Province of Nova Scotia and university teacher education programs should take steps to strengthen the preparation of teachers in the area of special education. This should include curriculum changes so that graduates are better prepared to work in Mi'kmaq communities

- An expanded program of professional development in the area of special education be made available to teachers of Mi'kmaq students in the M-K system

- An expanded program of training in the area of special needs be made available to teaching assistants working in M-K schools

- Funds be provided to improve the availability of resource personnel within M-K schools. In addition, M-K schools need better access to teams of specialists who can provide testing for students with special needs

- M-K work with the leaders of professional education programs for occupations such as audiology, occupational therapy and others in order to increase the number of Mi'kmaq students who are admitted to and who graduate from such programs

- In cooperation with other Mi'kmaq social agencies, M-K should develop an integrated program of support for Mi'kmaq families that would ensure that Mi'kmaq children and youth receive the support they require in order to reach their full academic potential

- Schools attended by M-K students make a concerted effort to increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children and of schools in the life of their community

- M-K develop a protocol with the Nova Scotia government for the ongoing sharing of information and consultation on issues of mutual concern in the area of special needs education

- After the M-K Board has approved the release of this report, a copy should be forwarded to the Assembly of First Nations to assist in the process of policy and funding development at the national level

- M-K's Special Education Sub-committee continue in existence and serve as the primary vehicle to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

Section 1 - Background

Trends in Educating Children with Special Needs in Canada

> *Historically, First Nation children with challenging needs would not attend school. [It has] often been felt that they could not or should not be attending schools. Over time we have moved from that point of view through the segregated school movement to the present trend of integration and total mainstreaming. The main impetus behind this movement has been the parents of many handicapped students, who feel their children should be educated with their non-handicapped peers.* (Vachon, 1992, p. 1)

Prior to the 1950s, students with special needs from all communities who attended schools were placed in large institutions. In many provinces during the 1950s and 1960s, it was common practice for advocates, most notably parent advocates for students with intellectual limitation, to establish special education schools or classes in, or close to, home communities. These operated separately from the regular school system. Over time modest changes began to take shape, but there was growing discontent about the "dumping ground" characterization of special schools and classes and the continuation of a dual system of regular and special education. In an attempt to improve the situation, many school boards examined their assessment and placement policies. They attempted to clarify definitions of students by category of exceptionality, assessment criteria, and documentation needed to determine placements. This resulted in increased demands for testing and an increased number of categories being developed. This tendency to try and improve the education of students with special needs by improving the methods of assessment, categorizing and placement, rather than improving programming, established a strong precedent for special education practice in general that still exists in some jurisdictions today (Andrews & Lupart, 2000, p. 34).

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a movement away from the emphasis on categorization and special education placements and a move towards the integration of students with special needs in regular classrooms. In Canada this movement was led by advocacy groups and was influenced greatly by federal legislation in the United States. Emphasis was placed on *what* and *how* students should learn. It was assumed that *where* they should learn would be the regular classroom, with services delivered in other educational settings only when necessary. This model required a continuum of support services ranging from consultations with teachers and parents to

direct instruction to students. It also required linkages to outside government departments and agencies, such as health and community services.

In many jurisdictions during the 1980s and 1990s, including Nova Scotia, new education policies were developed that reflected a philosophy of inclusion. The goal of inclusive schooling is described in the *Special Education Policy Manual* which was released by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture in 1996.

> *The goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in school programs and activities. The support services that are designed to meet students' diverse needs should be coordinated within the neighbourhood and to the extent possible, within grade level/subject area classrooms*. (p. 13)

Prior to 1996, a census-based funding arrangement was in effect between the Province of Nova Scotia and school boards. Using this model, all students in a school district were counted and an amount based on the total number of students enrolled in the jurisdiction was designated for special education. This funding arrangement did not require placing students with special needs in categories to receive funding for services, resources or facilities, and was congruent with the policies in the *Special Education Policy Manual* when it was released in 1996. Not all provinces opted for this method of funding special education, as some continued to use methods based on some form of categorization.

Moving from a categorical to an inclusive model changes the purpose of individual student assessment. In a categorical model, assessment is primarily used for placement and/or funding, while in an inclusive model, assessment is used primarily for programming purposes. In an inclusive model assessments are not used for placement as the placement of a student is assumed to be the regular classroom with removal of the student to another setting only when necessary for programming purposes.

Categorical Model

Assessment
↓
Placement
↓
Programming

Inclusive Model

Assessment
↓
Programming
↓
Placement

The following passage from the *Special Education Policy Manual* (Nova Scotia, 1996) summarizes this change in the education of students with special needs from a focus on placement to a focus on programming.

> *In the past, the focus of the assessment process has often been to provide direction and confirm placement decisions. In more recent years, school boards have begun to focus on examining individual strengths and needs for the purpose of guiding the development of goals and objectives to meet these needs. The student's program is the central focus around which other decisions revolve, such as determining the environments in which students will learn. Preparing all students for a lifetime of learning requires appropriate programming in a variety of educational settings.* (p. 32)

In addition to policy development during the 1990s, new theories and initiatives supported by academic research have emerged to support inclusion. One of the main initiatives, the Regular Education Initiative, is a move to transfer responsibility for the education of exceptional students from special education teachers only to a responsibility shared with classroom teachers. Special education/resource teachers and classroom teachers become part of a larger school team that includes parents, administrators, and other professionals such as psychologists and speech-language pathologists when deemed necessary. This team collaborates to develop, implement, and evaluate an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for a student, based on the student's strengths and needs. Intellectual ability is considered when determining strengths and needs.

To support the program planning process and IPP implementation, various models of collaboration are used. The most promising model is co-teaching, which occurs when two or more teachers share the responsibility for a single group of students, typically in a single classroom setting. Combining the strengths of the classroom teacher and resource/special education teacher can create options for

all students. The co-teaching model presupposes co-planning and co-assessment (Friend, Bursuck & Hutchinson, 1998).

Other initiatives that foster inclusive education in the classroom include student-centered learning, outcome-based education, community-referenced instruction, interdisciplinary curriculum, multicultural education, the application of multiple intelligence theory, authentic assessment of student performance, multi-age grouping, use of technology in the classroom, peer-mediated instruction, teaching responsibility and peacemaking, constructivist learning, and collaborative teaming among students and teachers (Udvari-Solner, A. & Thousand, 1995, p. 87).

Since the 1990s, curriculum for public schools in Nova Scotia has been developed using a learning outcomes framework. This has changed the way in which the education needs of students are identified and addressed in schools.

> *The learning outcomes framework consists of a series of curriculum outcomes statements describing what knowledge, skills and attitudes students are expected to demonstrate as a result of their cumulative learning experiences in the primary-graduation continuum. General curriculum outcomes statements identify what students are expected to know, be able to do, and value upon completion of study in a curriculum area. ... Key-stage curriculum outcomes statements identify what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 as a result of their cumulative learning experiences in a curriculum area. Specific curriculum outcomes statements identify what students are expected to know or be able to do at the end of a particular grade or a particular course.* (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999, p. B-4)

The success of students following the provincial curriculum is determined by their success in achieving the outcomes as stated in the curriculum guides provided by the Department of Education.

If a student has difficulty achieving the outcomes of the approved curriculum, changes can be made to teaching strategies to help the student achieve the outcomes. These adaptations to teaching strategies may be made to one or more of the following areas: presentation, evaluation, motivation, environment, class organization, and/or resources. If a student cannot achieve the curriculum outcomes with adaptations, the student may have an IPP prepared, based on the student's strengths

and needs and with outcomes appropriate for the student. In many cases these outcomes may be the same as the general curriculum outcomes for the class, but at a significantly lower specific outcome level than for the rest of the class. In other cases, the student may have severe education needs and require additional outcomes that are quite different from the class. The setting for instruction is assumed to be the regular classroom, although a student may be instructed in other settings under certain conditions.

The purpose of assessment using a learning outcomes framework is to evaluate the student's progress towards achieving the outcomes over time, rather than comparing the student to the achievement of other students. Thus, in a curriculum using a learning outcomes framework, the role of individual formalized standardized assessments which compares the achievement or intelligence level of a student to a "normed" group is greatly reduced, if not eliminated. The only place for individual standardized assessments in a learning outcomes framework is, on some occasions, to help determine the strengths and needs of a student for individual program planning. Other assessment techniques such as observation, performance assessment, anecdotal records, portfolios, teacher-made tests, self-assessment, miscue analysis, and running records are more appropriate for measuring the achievement of curriculum outcomes. The following quote summarizes these points on assessment in relation to a student-centered focus on curriculum.

> *Artificial designations such as categories, IQs, and grade levels must be replaced with student-centered focus of determining individual learning strengths and needs, and with the differentiation of instruction and resources to tap the learning potential of all students. If a student is removed to other educational settings, it can only be justified on the basis of individual learning needs, not on categorical membership*. (Andrews & Lupart, 2000, p. 37)

Identifying students with special needs, in a school using a curriculum based on a learning outcomes framework, requires new tools, such as the Severity of Special Educational Needs Guide in Appendix A. In this model, students with special education needs are viewed as having mild, moderate or severe education needs. The intensity of the intervention required depends on the severity of the student's education needs.

Students with mild education needs:

- are high prevalence in population
- require no additional services
- are identified by family or school

Minor intervention required as:

- student can achieve the outcomes of the approved curriculum
- with normal support by classroom teacher

Students with moderate education needs:

- are high prevalence in population
- require low-cost additional services
- are identified by family or school and are often medically diagnosed

Moderate intervention required as

- students remain in the regular program with planned strategies or adaptations to enable student to succeed
- teacher(s) with the support of a program planning team as required, plan specific strategies to assist students
- changes can be made to instructional strategies, evaluation methods, and/or support services while maintaining outcomes of the provincially approved curriculum
- changes documented in cumulative record file

Student with severe education need:

- are low prevalence in population
- require high-cost additional services
- are identified by family or school and should always be medically diagnosed

Extensive intervention required as:

- Individual Program Plan (IPP) required to meet special needs of student
- program planning team must collaboratively plan, implement and evaluate the IPP
- outcomes of provincially approved curriculum must be changed to meet students' needs
- written IPP must include annual and specific outcomes
- signatures of parents/guardians are required to indicate agreement on IPP

By using a model such as this one, many of the difficulties encountered with solely using formalized standardized assessments to identify special needs are overcome as the measure is based on the attainment of curriculum or individual outcomes, not the capacities or achievements of other groups or individuals.

However, there are reasons other than educational to assess a student using standardized tests. At times it is necessary to assess and place individuals in categories for medical, research, and/or funding purposes.

It should be noted that many students with special needs have needs other than strictly education ones that must be addressed concurrently with education needs. These needs, mostly medical and therapeutic, are met through the provision of a wide variety of professional supports such as resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and pediatricians, as well as the provision of nonprofessional supports such as teacher assistants and school supervisors. Sometimes technical supports, adaptations to facilities, and transportation adaptations are also required. This support system must be coordinated with agencies outside of the school system and is often costly. Many times, it is the failure to deliver adequate, appropriate and timely services at the support level that limits the education opportunities for students with special needs.

If sufficient support services for students with special needs are available in schools and communities, and there are appropriate instructional strategies in place in the regular classroom, these students will have a good chance of reaching their full potential. Proactive classroom instruction can reduce the number of students at risk for school failure. In the past with groups that historically underachieved in school, special education was often used as a mechanism to place the responsibility for failure with the student. Classroom instruction and school culture were rarely examined for possible causes of student failure. By taking a proactive approach, all factors that impact on a student's learning can be continually evaluated and improvements made to reflect the evaluations.

Influence of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

As special education in Canada expanded, it was shaped by provincial law, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, related court cases, research, and parent and professional advocacy (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998, p. 6).

Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which came into effect in 1982, individuals are guaranteed life, liberty and security of person in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. In addition, the Charter advances equality rights that aim to protect individuals against discrimination based on disabilities (Black-Branch, 1995).

> *Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability*. (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, cited in Black-Branch, 1995, p. 61)

With the guarantee of rights came the challenge to provide the facilities, resources and qualified teachers needed to give each student with special needs the opportunity to reach his or her potential.

> *From the onset it is essential to remember that the term "equality" refers to equal opportunity. Equal opportunity means that every child should be given the chance to develop to his or her maximum potential. They should have access to a program of education that includes adequate facilities and resources and they should be assigned to appropriately trained teachers so they can achieve their fullest academic and intellectual potential*. (Black-Branch, 1995, p. 64)

Educating Students with Special Needs in First Nation Communities in Nova Scotia

> *For nearly a hundred years, the federal government has fulfilled its treaty obligations to Native people by transferring responsibility for the day-to-day operations of Native schools to other organizations, usually various religious denominations. The now infamous residential school system was a prime example of this practice.* (Brady, 2000, p. 181)

From 1929 to 1960 in Nova Scotia, many students from Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia attended the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie. The experiences of the students at the school and the effects on the Mi'kmaq language and culture are well documented in *Out of the Depths* by Isabelle Knockwood (1992). The lack of regard for the value of families in the lives of children, the contempt shown for the Mi'kmaq culture, and the attempt to eliminate the Mi'kmaq language hindered the development of many students. Although there were students who had positive education and spiritual experiences, the effects of the residential school were overall quite negative and impacted on families through generations.

In the summary of a study titled *The Health of the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Population* by Etter, Moore, McIntyre, Rudderham and Wien (1998) it was stated that:

> *among adults attending residential school (10% of the adult sample), 46% believed their experience there contributed to the problems of health or well-being*. (p. 6)

The residential school experience seems to have had a greater negative effect on females than males, as in the study it was shown that 40% of males and 51% of females felt that residential schools contributed to their health problems. (p. 6)

During this time period, most children with identified special needs in First Nation communities remained at home in the care of their families and did not attend school. Some were placed in provincial institutions for people with specific disabilities, such as the facility for the blind in Halifax. This pattern was consistent with practices in other communities in Nova Scotia.

The reaction of families and communities to the treatment of students at the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie and the strength gained from the social movement of the 1960s, led to a movement among First Nation communities in Nova Scotia to regain control over the education of their children.

> *By the 1960s, Native leaders were beginning to formulate their own policy on education which led later on to the National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 statement on Indian Control of Indian Education. Many meetings and many hours and days of discussion led up to the development of that policy. At one of those meetings a man*

> *made a very powerful argument for our taking full control of our children's education. No one remembers exactly what Edward Poulette said, but everyone who was there remembers what he did. He took off his shirt and showed the scars on his back. They had been put there over thirty years earlier by Edward McLeod and Father Mackey.* (Knockwood, 1992, pp. 153-154)

In June, 1968, the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie closed. The remaining students at the school began attending provincial or federal schools in or near their home communities. It was during this same time period that segregated classes for students with special needs were being established in federal and provincial schools. Often these classes were in the largest school in the area with students with special needs being transported daily from their homes. Through tuition agreements, students from First Nation communities with special needs were also eligible to attend the segregated classes in provincial schools.

During this period First Nation communities continued to be concerned over the high dropout rates of students and systemic and institutional racism in provincial and federal schools. The efforts to regain jurisdiction over the education of their children continued until 1999 when jurisdiction was finally returned to First Nation communities.

Jurisdiction of Education in First Nation Communities in Nova Scotia

> *On April 22, 1999 a federal Order-In-Council brought force to Bill C-30, the Mi'kmaq Education Act and a provincial Order-In-Council brought force to Bill No. 4 the Mi'kmaq Education Act. These two pieces of legislation are firsts of their kind in Canada and mark the final steps of the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia in returning jurisdiction for education on-reserve, to First Nations in Nova Scotia, a process that has been underway since 1992*. (Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, 1999, p. 1)

With the return of the jurisdiction for education to First Nation communities came the mandated responsibility in Bill C-30 to provide the facilities, resources, and qualified teachers needed to give each First Nation student the opportunity to reach his or her academic and intellectual potential. In addition, the mandate included the responsibility to provide a level of service that was equivalent to the service provided in provincial schools.

> *The educational programs and services so provided must be comparable to programs and services provided by other educational systems in Canada, in order to permit the transfer of students to and from those systems without academic penalty to the same extent as students can transfer between those other education systems*. (An Act respecting the powers of the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia in relation to education, Statutes of Canada 1998, Bill C-30, Chapter 24, 7.2)

To facilitate the process, 9 of 13 First Nation communities in Nova Scotia joined together and formed Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, an organization dedicated to providing high quality education for students from First Nation communities. These communities included Eskasoni, Membertou, Chapel Island, Wagmatcook, Waycobah, Pictou Landing, Shubenacadie, Annapolis Valley, and Acadia. The opportunity for the other four communities to join M-K remains an option that they may choose at a later time.

Section 2 - Current Issues

Issues Related to Funding Special Education

In order for students with special needs in First Nation communities in Nova Scotia to have the opportunities to reach their full potential, adequate financial resources must be available from DIAND to support the implementation of timely and appropriate programs, resources, and services.

Although there are many difficulties with the DIAND guidelines[2] which have been well documented elsewhere, the following difficulties are of particular concern in Nova Scotia. These concerns are that the guidelines:

- are administratively burdensome
- are based on an outdated concept of disabilities,
- are based on an outdated service delivery model,
- are inadequate to address the needs of the high number of students with moderate needs in the low-cost category,
- rely heavily on the use of standardized assessments, and
- assume that the categories of special needs are the same in all jurisdictions across Canada

Administrative Burden

Under the M-K Agreement, the onus for obtaining funds to meet the needs of students in the "high cost" category falls on the schools. The latter must apply for funding and submit extensive documentation, including the results of assessments. This places a considerable administrative and financial burden on schools, especially small ones. This, in addition to the other issues raised below, makes the administration of the funding arrangement administratively difficult for schools.

[2] The DIAND guidelines are very brief and describe funding provision for high cost and low cost special education. We were unable to ascertain the origin of the document for citation purposes.

Concept of Disabilities

The DIAND guidelines are based on an outdated concept of disabilities as evident in the following passage:

> *PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED*
>
> - *Student requires assistive devices (walker, wheel chair, etc.)*
> - *Needs one to one tutorial or paramedical assistance during class hours*
> - *Requires a great deal of personal care (e.g., feeding, toileting, personal hygiene)*
> - *Cannot function in a regular classroom program due to physical impairment*

This passage assumes that children who are physically challenged are also intellectually challenged and cannot function in a regular classroom. Experience has shown that many students with severe physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, have high-cost needs, but are intellectually able to achieve the outcomes of the provincial curriculum with adequate, appropriate and timely technical and human supports.

Students with special needs must be viewed holistically as valuable members of their communities. Public policies must move away from the narrow view of disabilities evident in the DIAND guidelines and reflect a more holistic view that would guide the integration of services for students in schools in their home communities. This holistic approach is consistent with First Nation beliefs and values.

Smith & Foster (1996) looked at the effects of public policies on people with disabilities and noted that students have often been disadvantaged by policies that were based on the following assumptions:

- *disability is biologically based;*
- *persons with disabilities are "victims" facing endless problems;*
- *a person with disabilities is defined by his or her disability;*
- *having a disability always means the need for help from others*.

> *Public policy based on these assumptions has meant a history of exclusion, institutionalization and marginalization of persons with disabilities*.
>
> *This perspective is being replaced by one which understands disability in a social and political context, recognizing disability as a* public issue*, rather than an* individual problem*.* (Smith and Foster, 1966, p. 1)

As public policy, the DIAND guidelines for funding special education should be changed to reflect holistic and inclusive practices.

Service Delivery Model

In the DIAND guidelines for identifying students with special needs, a distinction is made between "high-cost" and "low-cost" special needs. As noted in the previous section, the guidelines assume that students with high-cost needs who are physically impaired cannot function in a regular classroom. Therefore, it would follow that they would be placed in segregated classrooms in schools or in residential settings, rather than in regular classrooms in their home communities.

In Nova Scotia, full-time residential facilities for students with special needs closed in the 1990s, and the responsibility for the students returned to local boards and communities. Many of these students with high-cost special needs are now integrated into regular classrooms with support services. Others have never been placed in a segregated setting as they were integrated into schools in their home communities in grade Primary.

It should be noted that short-term residential placements in Nova Scotia still exist for students with sensory impairments through the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) for limited duration of usually one to two weeks. In a few cases these placements may be extended for a semester. These short-term placements are complemented by itinerant services from APSEA and school resources when the child or adolescent returns to his or her home community.

The new DIAND guidelines for funding must reflect the cost of a service delivery model designed to deliver services, such as those provided by resource teachers, psychologists and speech-language pathologists, in classrooms in community schools with linkages to outside agencies.

High Incidence of Students with "Low-Cost" Education Needs

The DIAND guidelines do not provide a mechanism to adequately account for the high number of students in the low-cost category who require additional education services to reach their academic and intellectual potential. We will report results in Section 4 below which demonstrate that a large proportion of students in First Nation communities in Nova Scotia have special needs and are at risk for school failure. With the help of their parents and communities, all of these students must have their education needs addressed in school in an adequate, appropriate and timely fashion. If the education needs of students in this category are not addressed in school at an early age through early intervention and/or prevention programs, they may become students with high-cost needs, drop out of school, and/or fail to reach their academic and intellectual potential. Children at risk whose needs are not addressed often become adults with health, employment and social problems.

A definition of special needs that is broader than the one in the DIAND guidelines, is necessary if there is to be adequate funding for the resources, facilities, and trained professionals to address the education needs of students at risk for school failure.

Reliance on Standardized Assessments

For schools to receive funding for students with special needs, the DIAND guidelines require that:

> *These children are classified as "exceptional" by school board personnel holding qualifications enabling them to assess and place students in classes for "exceptional children".*

To assess the students for placement, standardized assessments are used. These assessments exist in many forms and are used to measure a wide variety of physical and intellectual abilities. Most assessments conducted to assess the special needs of students for placement include standardized measures of intelligence.

To receive funding for students with high-cost needs, schools must comply with these guidelines, even though the standardized tests used for classification of First Nation students are questionable on ethical grounds. Chrisjohn, 1999, addressed many of the issues involved in the use of standardized assessments in First Nation Communities. He noted that:

> *In summary, psychological and educational ethics* requires *that a test pass through certain procedures* (test norming) *and exhibit certain logical and statistical properties* (validity and reliability) *before they be used for selection, diagnosis, evaluation or theory building. No psychological or educational test, no matter how frequently used with First Nations populations has* ever *been subjected to these procedures, nor has any demonstrated the requisite logical and statistical properties!* (pp. 22-23)

Not only have test developers disadvantaged First Nation peoples by excluding them from sample groups during the norming process of test development, they have also failed to value skills in which they may excel.

> *It is interesting that many native groups do much better on spatial tests than do whites. However, if these spatial tests are embedded in language, and therefore linguistic tests, the whites score higher than do non-whites. The dependence of Western culture on linguistic and mathematical skills is so pervasive that it is often forgotten that there are other forms of intelligence, some of which cannot be tested at all.* (MacKay & Rubin, 1996, p. 39)

The ethical concern over the use of standardized assessments for placing students from First Nation communities in categories for funding is also a concern for researchers who conduct studies across Canada.

In addition to the ethical concerns, Dworet and Rathgeber (1998) describe a major difficulty inherent in assessing types and prevalence of special needs across jurisdictions in Canada:

> *Unlike the United States which provides federal definitions for various exceptionality categories, the Canadian system permits each jurisdiction to determine on its own, what, if any categories will exist and the definition used for inclusion in these categories.* (p. 3)

To illustrate their point, they reviewed the definitions of behavioural exceptionalities in various jurisdictions across Canada. They noted that the definition of this single exceptionality varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions have a single definition, whereas others have multiple definitions.

Herbert (1999) identified the following two additional reasons why it is difficult to compare studies across jurisdictions in Canada:

- *separate figures are not kept for some categories of special needs*
- *definitions of Aboriginal vary between those satisfying the Federal Indian Act and those who self-identified.* (p. 18)

In summary, the present DIAND methodology for funding services for students with special needs relies on outdated concepts of service delivery models and disabilities. The guidelines rely heavily on standardized assessments with inherent cultural biases that place First Nation students at a disadvantage and are not responsive to the high number of students with mild to moderate special needs. The present DIAND funding formula is inadequate to provide for adequate, appropriate and timely resources, facilities, and trained professionals to give students with special needs the opportunities to reach their full potential - opportunities guaranteed all Canadians under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In addition, the guidelines are not congruent with the present policies and practices in place in the schools of Nova Scotia. But, as noted by Chrisjohn (1999):

> *Because of resource dependency, natives have no alternative but to work within the limits imposed by DIA.[Department of Indian Affairs].* (p. 23)

Poverty, Health, and Special Education Needs

A discussion on the high numbers of children from First Nation communities identified as having special needs would not be complete without looking at some possible underlying causes that make children vulnerable for special education needs, such as poverty and health factors.

In the summary of the study of *The Health of the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Population* (Etter et al, 1998) it was stated:

> *Almost all Mi'kmaq parents rate the health of their children as being either excellent or very good. However, these children start out with some disadvantages compared to other Nova Scotian children, which might affect their long-term health and their ability to learn at school and to succeed in life. These disadvantages include being exposed to smoking before (or after) birth, not being breast-fed, and having health conditions such as ear problems which might affect children's hearing and language development.* (p. 2)

In the summary on the health of Mi'kmaq youth it was stated:

- *In comparison to children, the health of Mi'kmaq youth is more questionable. Fewer rate their health as being excellent or very good, and larger numbers make less healthy choices about eating breakfast or having healthy lunches or snacks. The appearance of problems such as learning difficulties is also troublesome. In addition, levels of smoking are quite high, as is participation in games of chance.*

- *An important theme emerges from the data on youth, and that is the more difficult and stressful position in which female youth find themselves. In comparison with males, they have more difficulty in getting along with their families, are more likely to be overweight (and to be concerned about it), and are more likely to drink alcohol and use drugs. Their self-image is lower and they are far more likely to be both stressed and depressed.* (p. 7)

These summaries on the health of Mi'kmaq children and youth identified factors that could contribute to high numbers of learning problems in schools.

The health study also looked at the socio-economic status of the adult population and discovered:

- *The annual income of adults living on reserve is very low. Only 39% of adult males and 31% of adult females relied on wages from work as their main source of income. Transfer payments, especially social assistance, are the main source of income for 57 per cent of adult males and 66 per cent of adult females.*

- *Low incomes are a direct result of low levels of employment. Only 37% of the adult population was working at the time of the survey. However, a third of those not working were employed in the previous 12 months.*

- *Only 35% of Mi'kmaq adults believe their level of income is adequate to meet their needs.* (p. 7)

The socio-economic status of parents has a direct effect on the education of children. Levin (2000) looked at poverty as a policy issue in the context of education and noted, among other facts, the high numbers of Aboriginal children living in poverty.

> *The ill-effects of poverty are both physical and psychological. Many educators can testify to the difficulties faced by children whose home circumstances include poor quality housing, lack of nutritious food, the constant emotional turmoil of inadequate income, and the lack of self-respect that comes from not having what everyone else seems to take for granted. Much of what passes for "exceptionality" in children may in fact be the result of inadequate income.* (p. 198)

To be successful, attempts through public policy to address the special educational needs of children in First Nation Communities must also address health, employment, housing, social, and recreational issues through a concentrated and coordinated effort among various agencies and levels of government.

The Need for a Comprehensive Special Education Policy

In a DIAND draft document titled *Special Education, First Nations Education in Canada and Related Educational Theory and Research* (1998) current literature on the topic was reviewed. In the document it was stated:

> *Reviews of special education in First Nations schools in Canada have repeatedly shown that the quality of special education in these schools is lower than that in provincial schools. Several documents contend that funding for First Nations schools'*

special education is lower than that of the provinces. (Brady; DIAND, 1997; FNEC, 1992; FNESC: Hull; Phillips, 1986). Other authors note that, even where funding is equitable, several other factors adversely affect the quality of special education in schools. The factors include:

- *higher than-average incidence rates due to unique socio-economic circumstances among Aboriginal students (FNESC; HLA Consultants; Paquette; Wiener)*
- *lack of access to provincial consultation, in-service and assessment services, or their equivalent (Hull)*
- *lack of access to provincial prevention or early intervention programs, or their equivalent (Hull)*
- *schools which are often isolated and therefore have higher costs, and more difficulty recruiting and training quality teachers (HLA Consultants; Paulet; 1991)*
- *schools which are often small and do not benefit from the reduced cost of shared services (HLA Consultants; Paulet, 1991)*
- *traditional assessment techniques which are inappropriate for Aboriginal students (Common; Persi; Seyfort)*
- *systemic bias which may result in misassessment of Aboriginal students (Myles)*
- *special language needs which are inappropriately met (Duquette)* (p. 2)

Although these studies looked mostly at First Nation communities outside of Nova Scotia, many of the factors identified as contributing to the problems in First Nation schools elsewhere could apply to First Nation schools in Nova Scotia.

In summary, the challenge to provide adequate, appropriate and timely resources, facilities and appropriately trained professionals for the students with special education needs and their families is great. A comprehensive special education policy that respects the language, history, and culture of the Mi'kmaq people would enhance the possibility that the challenges would be met. As many students in First Nation communities attend provincial schools at some point in their schooling, the new policy must be congruent with the policies and procedures of the Nova Scotia Department of Education, and policies and procedures of related government agencies such as Community Services, Health and Justice. In some cases, provincial policies and procedures may need to be adapted to reflect the uniqueness of First Nation communities.

Section 3 - Policy Development and Funding Models

Policy Development

In most First Nation communities in Canada comprehensive policies relating to the education of students with special needs are in the process of being developed. Communities in Quebec and British Columbia have conducted extensive research and are close to completing their policies.

Policy development usually begins with a statement of key fundamental beliefs. Bill Corrigan in a draft document prepared for First Nations Education Council of Quebec (FNEC) identified the following education beliefs to guide special education policy development.

- *Aboriginal Education, including Special Education, should respect, honor and promote aboriginal values.*
- *First Nations children with special needs require adequate special services appropriate to their needs.*
- *Education should occur in a community insofar as these arrangements are conducive to good education progress,*
- *All children have the right to educational services appropriate to their needs and delivered by an appropriately qualified person.*
- *Special Education services should be provided based on what is in the best interest of the child.*
- *Parents have a right to have a child educated in their community insofar as those arrangements are conducive to good educational progress.*
- *Communities have the right and an obligation to adapt and use policy guidelines in a manner consistent with the forgoing principles.*
- *The Special Education policy should be integrated into global Education policy in each community*. (Corrigan, 2000, p. 3)

Models for Developing Special Education Policy

In First Nation communities in Nova Scotia, a draft policy, *Mi'kmawi-Kina'matnewey Teplutagn* developed by M-K Educators in the 1990s guides education practice. This document contains the following components: The Right to Attend School, School Attendance, Attendance Counsellor, Home Education, Private Schools, Education Meetings, Conflict of Interest, Policies and Procedures (Band Operated Schools), Policies and Procedures (All Bands), Student Records, Agreement with

Other Bands, Textbooks, Special Education Needs, Mi'kmaq Language and Culture, Student Discipline, Appeals, and Appeals Circle.

The section on special education needs states:

1) *The Band Council, or any other committee or boards established by the Band Council for purposes of governing education, may offer special educational services for children who are unable, by reason of physical or mental disability, to benefit from the instructional program available through the regular classes or courses.*
2) *The admission of children to special education services will be done after consultation with their parents, the teachers identified with those services and the staff concerned.* (p. 21)

The Special Education Policy Manual released in Nova Scotia in 1996 (N.S. Dept. of Education , 1996) and *FNEC Special Education Policy Manual, Draft 3*, (Corrigan, 2000) are potential models for special education policy development in First Nation communities in Nova Scotia. A brief description of the two approaches and their advantages and disadvantages is presented below. Since neither approach may meet all the needs of First Nation communities, consideration is also given to the development of a hybrid model that incorporates the best elements from each.

B.1, Option 1 – Policy Based on the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy Manual	
This policy begins with an overview and a statement of principles. It is divided into the 3 sections: Student Supports and Services, Programming, and Partnerships. It is based on a noncategorical approach to educating students with special needs and is congruent with the mainly census-based funding formula in the province.	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
▪ Following the framework of the *Special Education Manual* would save time and be cost efficient. ▪ The *Special Education Policy Manual* contains all of the components necessary in a policy in provincial schools in Nova Scotia. ▪ There would be similarity in the policies in First Nation schools and provincial schools. ▪ The sharing of resources, personnel, and professional development with provincial organizations would be facilitated by similar policies. ▪ Students would have easier transitions when moving between First Nation schools and provincial schools. ▪ Collaboration with various provincial government departments and agencies on issues related to children and youth with special needs would be easier. An example of this would be the transition process from Early Childhood Intervention Programs to school for children with special needs who are about to enter school for the first time. ▪ The potential for sharing professionals between provincial schools and First Nation schools would be created. ▪ Formal links with the Nova Scotia Department of Education are already established for curriculum development and student services. ▪ Teachers educated in Nova Scotia use provincial policies as a foundation for their teacher training. ▪ The philosophy of inclusiveness upon which the provincial policy is based is consistent with the philosophy of M-K.	▪ Some policies in the *Special Education Policy Manual* may not be consistent with Mi'kmaq traditions and culture. ▪ *The Special Education Policy Manual* may not reflect the wishes of some communities. ▪ The census-based funding formula that reflects the policy may not be sufficiently responsive to the distribution of students with high-cost needs in relatively small communities, nor to high numbers of students in the low-cost category. ▪ In Nova Scotia, the procedures for obtaining funding and the accountability for programming for individual students with special needs are difficult for parents/guardians to understand as procedures that flow from a census-based formula tend to "lump" services together in a school.

B.2, Option 2 – Policy Based on FNEC Special Education Manual, Draft 3

This draft contains an overview with a statement of principles, a definition of students with special needs, definitions of 9 categories of difficulties or challenges a student may encounter, a code of ethics, and 14 policies related to educating students with special needs. Policy 14 indicates that there is an assumption that the funding formula will be based on 8 or 9 categories of special needs.

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ The policies would be consistent with the traditions and culture of First Nation peoples. ▪ A similar policy and funding formula would facilitate negotiations with DIAND. ▪ Similar policies in First Nation communities in Canada would encourage the mobility of students and professionals. ▪ Similar policies would facilitate research in First Nation communities across Canada. ▪ Common and/or similar policies would help to form a strong force for change. ▪ There would be cost efficiencies in sharing documentation and experiences. ▪ There would be cost efficiencies in having methodologies, materials and resources developed and/or adapted for First Nation students.	▪ The province of Quebec, FNEC, and DIAND have policies and funding arrangements based on categorical distinctions, as opposed to the non-categorical approach of policies and funding arrangements in provincial schools in Nova Scotia. This categorical approach is not congruent with education policies in Nova Scotia and is expensive and administratively burdensome, as it requires expensive individualized assessments. ▪ Policies generated in First Nation communities outside of the Maritimes must respond to communities that may be large and remote from provincial service centers. In Nova Scotia First Nation communities are relatively small and, as are all communities in Nova Scotia, relatively close to provincial service centers. ▪ The new special education policy for First Nation communities in Nova Scotia must have a mechanism for working with provincial government departments and agencies. A special education policy based on a policy developed outside of Nova Scotia may not be responsive to the specific policies in Health, Education and Community Services in the province.

B.3, Option 3 – Hybrid Model Based on Options 1 & 2	
This model would include aspects of the Nova Scotia *Special Education Policy Manual* and the *FNEC Special Education Policy Manual, Draft 3*.	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
▪ Some components could be taken from each of the two preceding options to make the new policy responsive to the unique needs of First Nation communities in Nova Scotia. ▪ This method would allow for creativity in policy development. ▪ The difficulty with accommodating the Nova Scotia method of census-based funding in the new policy could be overcome by having a hybrid funding formula.	▪ Developing this model would be more time consuming and costly. ▪ The new policy may be inconsistent in some ways with all other jurisdictions.

Models for Funding Special Education

The following six models are used to fund special education in various jurisdictions across North America. In many jurisdictions hybrid models are used.

1. Flat Grant

- Using a flat grant formula, students with special needs are counted and a "per-student with special needs" rate is established for the jurisdiction. The amount the jurisdiction receives is derived by multiplying the number of students with special needs by a set rate. Distinctions are not made for categories of exceptionalities.

2. Pupil Weighting

- Using this formula students with special needs are identified by established categories of exceptionalities. The amount of money for special education the jurisdiction receives from the province or state is derived by multiplying the

number of students with special needs in each category by the amount of money set for the specific category. The sum of all the categories provides the amount to be funded.

3. Census-Based Funding

- Using this formula, the amount a jurisdiction receives for special education is derived by multiplying a designated amount of money by the total number of students in the jurisdiction. Students with special needs are included in the total number. For example, in Nova Scotia in 1998-99, school boards were eligible to receive funding for special education in the amount of their total enrolment multiplied by $265.50 (Proactive Information Services, 1998, p. 120). This may not reflect actual spending, which varies considerably from one school board to another. A summary of actual expenditures in 1998-99 shows the Cape Breton-Victoria Board spending the least on special education at $366 per student while the Annapolis Valley Board spends the most at $492 per student enrolled. The average for the province is $409 (See Appendix H). The same table also provides data on special education expenditures as a per cent of total expenditures. For the province as a whole, that figure is 8.5 per cent, but it varies from a low of 6.4 per cent for the Acadien Provincial Board to a high of 10.3 per cent for the Annapolis Valley Board.

4. Resource-Based Funding

- Using this formula, "units" that can be funded are identified for each category of exceptionality. These units may include professionals, paraprofessionals, special equipment, classrooms, transportation, etc. Student-staff ratios are set for each category of exceptionality.

5. Percentage Reimbursement

- In most cases where this formula for funding special education is used, the province or state reimburses a jurisdiction for some percentage of the cost of educating students with special needs. Usually specific criteria are established

for the costs that will be shared. In a few cases there can be full recovery of costs.

6. Hybrid

- A hybrid formula is achieved by combining two or more formulae. In this way a formula can be designed to respond to the unique needs of an individual jurisdiction.

In a report by Jerry Paquette (1999) commissioned by FNEC Quebec, the advantages and disadvantages of each funding model are discussed and evaluated in the context of First Nation communities (see Appendix B).

During the 1990s in Canada there were major policy and funding changes in special education that resulted in a number of jurisdictions moving towards a hybrid formula for funding special education. A report prepared by FNEC Quebec (1999) titled *Proposal for Funding for Special Education Program in First Nations Education Communities* stated:

> *Of the ten provinces and two territories from which we were able to obtain information on special-education funding, eight were using some hybrid formula. Of these, five combined census-based funding with some form of pupil weighting and two combined census-based funding with cost recovery. One combined census-based funding with an individualized voucher-style pupil weighting grant. Other Canadian jurisdictions used pupil weighting or census-based funding or some form of negotiated cost recovery* (p.11)

Drawing from a report by Proactive Information Services Inc. (1998), summary notes provided by the Assembly of First Nations Education Sector review the models used for funding special education in the Canadian provinces and territories (see Appendix C).

Paquette (1999), in the same summary notes from the AFN, identified common criteria used to develop special education funding formulae in a specific jurisdiction. They are:

1. *Total enrolment*
2. *Types of placement (high cost, low cost, out of board)*
3. *Category of exceptionality*
4. *Authorized classroom units*
5. *Actual expenditures*

6. *Allowable costs*
7. *Number of special education staff*
8. *Services received*
9. *Grant adjustments (weighting for population sparsely or distance from major urban center)* (p. 2)

We noted above that in Nova Scotia in 1998-99, school boards receive in the order of $266 per student enrolled in the school system to meet expenses related to special needs education, and in reality they spend quite a bit more than that. Mi'kmaq communities, on the other hand, receive only $216 per student yet, as we will see below, they have a much higher proportion of their student body with additional education needs[3].

In addition to the above factors, First Nation communities in Nova Scotia have an additional factor to consider when looking at funding arrangements. Since overall education funding per student in Nova Scotia is lower than almost every other province or territory in Canada (Appendix I), any arrangements that pegs funding to provincial funding or standards could put First Nations with special needs at a disadvantage when compared to those in other First Nation communities in Canada.

We turn now to describing the study and presenting the data that was collected specifically for this report.

[3] Educational funding for the Mi'kmaq communities flows through M-K to each of the Mi'kmaq bands. A sum of $216 per student is included in the tuition allocation for 1996-97, a sum which has apparently not increased in the intervening years. In addition, money for students with high cost special needs may be provided by M-K or by individual Bands on a case by case basis. For students going to school off-reserve, each Band negotiates a tuition agreement with the relevant school board. All services except busing and counselling (which are handled by the Bands themselves) are to be provided in exchange for the monies transferred under the tuition agreement. (Source: M-K Staff).

Section 4 – The Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Special Needs Study

Introduction

The main task of the data collection phase of this study was to determine the number and proportion of Mi'kmaq children who have additional or special education needs. More precisely, we were asked by Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey to focus on the children living on the 9 reserves that have signed the M-K Education Agreement, and to collect information about the special education needs, if any, of those students whether they attended school off or on reserve.[4]

In addition to counting the absolute number of students with additional education needs, we also wanted to determine what proportion they were of the total Mi'kmaq student population from the 9 communities. This made it necessary to collect information on all the Mi'kmaq students who are part of the nominal roll of the M-K Authority, whether or not they had additional education needs. We also wanted to obtain information about the kinds of needs the students had, whether they had been officially diagnosed, and if there were any other factors that put them at risk of school failure.

Methodology

To accomplish this task, we designed the form that is reproduced in Appendix D of this report. When used for data collection, it is a two-sided, legal-sized form, and our objective was to have the form filled in for all of the Mi'kmaq students covered by the M-K Agreement as of September 30, 1999.[5] The form includes the following kinds of information:

- **Background information** about the student, such as the name of his/her home community, the name of the school, grade level, date of birth, gender, and first language

[4] While four reserves have not signed the M-K agreement, they tend to be among the smaller communities in the province. The 9 communities that are part of the agreement represent approximately 85 per cent of the total on reserve population in Nova Scotia.

[5] This is the date when student lists are finalized for the 1999-2000 academic year.

- **Additional education needs.** The form asks whether the student has additional education needs and, if so, the level of severity of the need.

- **Type of additional education needs**. If a student is gifted or has a disability, disorder or handicap, the form inquires into the category of the condition, such as cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or being gifted[6]. Under each category, the type of condition was also identified. For example, a physical disability or health impairment might be specified further to involve such conditions as asthma, cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

- **Diagnosis and identification**. The form also inquires whether the condition has been formally assessed by a qualified person such as a psychologist, reading specialist or speech language pathologist. If a condition has not been formally assessed, but school personnel have identified it as being present, this is also noted.

- **Students at risk**. It is further clarified whether the student is at risk of school failure for reasons other than or in addition to the disability, disorder, health impairment, or giftedness noted above. This may be due to the student's characteristics or behaviour, or to the home or school environment. If so, school staff are asked to provide details

Each of the M-K school districts has an Education Director, and our first step in having the form completed was to contact the Education Director by mail and then in person to explain the study (if necessary)[7] and to obtain a list of the students in that particular area. Following a meeting with the Education Director, the research assistant would then get in touch with the principals of the schools where the Mi'kmaq children attended[8]. The principals would be asked for their cooperation and support, and the research assistant would then meet with school staff to explain the form to them and to have the forms completed.

[6] School staff were asked to identify only one category of special need, that is the primary one. There was also an option to check a category called "severe multiple disabilities". However, school staff frequently identified more than one category for a student.

[7] The Education Directors are brought together monthly by M-K, and so most of the Directors were already familiar with and supportive of the study.

Typically, the form was filled in by homeroom teachers, guidance counselors or other staff with particular responsibility for meeting the needs of students with additional education needs. The research assistants were instructed to remain with the staff while the forms were being filled in so that any questions could be answered and a high level of accuracy could be maintained. This was not always possible, however. Staff would often be prepared to meet with the assistant to receive instruction about the proper completion of the forms, but in many cases they asked that the forms be left with them for completion. Under these circumstances, arrangements would be made for the research assistant to collect the forms in person at a later date, or in a few cases to have the forms mailed to the assistant. The latter was asked to go over each form upon receipt and to clarify with staff if there were any questions about a particular form, or if it appeared the forms were completed incorrectly.

School staff received sufficient copies of the form so that they would not need to reproduce it themselves. They also received detailed printed instructions laying out exactly how the forms were to be completed (Appendix E). The handout material also included descriptions of the various categories of special needs in education (Appendix F), examples of the types of needs that full under each category (Appendix G), and a guide for assessing whether the identified need is minor, moderate or extensive (Appendix A).

While the school staff would have the names of all the Mi'kmaq students in the school for whom completed forms were required, the names were not included on the forms in order to protect the identity of the students. Rather, for each school, a research number was assigned to each student and it is only this number that appears on the form. The research team did not retain the names of the students so they cannot, at this point, be matched with the forms. To provide further protection, the results of the study will not be reported for small units of analysis, such as an individual school or a small community.

Once the forms were returned, completed and checked, preparations were made for the analysis by computer of the results. A coding manual was prepared wherein each piece of data on the

[8] If the school was located off reserve, under the jurisdiction of provincial school boards, we also contacted the

form was defined as a variable and text information was given a numerical code (for example, for the variable "gender", a female student was given a code of "1" and a male student a code of "2"). Data entry and analysis was accomplished using SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Results

The research team received excellent cooperation from all involved in this study, including the M-K staff, the Directors of Education, Provincial School Board personnel, principals and teachers. No one refused permission to proceed, and on the contrary many people (especially school staff) spent many hours completing the forms to a high level of accuracy. All schools which include M-K students, whether the schools were located on or off reserve, participated in the study. In total, that makes up a list of 56 schools. It should also be noted that the M-K Education Agreement includes all of the Mi'kmaq communities in the Province except for three small and one medium-sized community. Thus this data base includes the very large majority of Mi'kmaq children living on reserve in Nova Scotia.

The proportion of forms completed is extremely high. The M-K Education Authority states that its student population in 1999-2000 numbers 2,374. We had 2,310 forms completed, for a percentage completion rate over 97 per cent. This is a testimony to the care and attention given to the project by the schools involved, and provides a strong underpinning to the accuracy of the results. What happened to the 65 students for whom we do not have completed forms? The most likely explanation is that in some schools a few forms may not have been completed because the student, who may have been on the nominal roll and attending school on September 30, 1999 was no longer in school at the time the forms were completed in May-June 2000. The other possibility is that the list of students provided by the education director may not have been entirely complete, or the school lacked information about the student for other reasons.

We turn now to a presentation of the survey results.

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school board for permission to proceed.

A. Background Characteristics of the Students

Chart 1 summarizes the number of forms completed by community and shows that almost half the students included in the study come from the largest Mi'kmaq community, Eskasoni.

Chart 1
Completion of Forms, By Community

Community	Number of Forms	Community	Number of Forms
Acadia	49	Indian Brook	360
Annapolis Valley	23	Membertou	218
Chapel Island	139	Pictou Landing	101
Eskasoni	1051	Wagmatcook	146
04-Dec-00		Waycobah	222 2

In Chart 2, we learn that just over three-quarters of the M-K students are attending school on reserve. The remainder are traveling off reserve each day to attend schools that fall under the authority of non-Aboriginal school boards and the provincial Department of Education.

Chart 2
Location of School Attended by M-K Children

Location of School	**Number Students**	**Per Cent**
On reserve	1771	76.7
Off reserve	538	23.3
Total	**2309**	**100.0**

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We have a good number of students represented at each grade level, from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Chart 3). The chart also includes a few students at Eskasoni who are in a special program called the elementary and the junior high learning centre. In this program, students are placed in an ungraded elementary or junior high class and are given special instruction preparatory to their being returned to a regular graded classroom.

Chart 3
Grade Level of Students

Grade Level	Number	Grade Level	Number
Kindergarten	178	Grade 7	155
Primary	193	Grade 8	122
Grade 1	185	Grade 9	170
Grade 2	190	JHLC	6
Grade 3	171	Grade 10	156
Grade 4	166	Grade 11	124
Grade 5	161	10 + 11	14
Grade 6	154	11+12	4
ELC	17	Grade 12	128
Special Ed	7		

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Not surprisingly, we have an almost equal representation of male and female students in the study population (Chart 4).

Chart 4
Gender of Students

Gender	Frequency	Per Cent
Female	1117	48.9
Male	1165	51.1
Total	**2282**	**100.0**

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Chart 5 shows that their first language is Mi'kmaq in about one-third of the cases, while most of the remainder have English as their first language. This proportion would vary in different parts of the Province since Mi'kmaq language use is much higher in the Cape Breton area than on the Mainland.

Chart 5
First Language of Student

First Language	Frequency	Per Cent
Mi'kmaq	757	33.4
English	1413	62.3
Both	97	4.3
Total	**2267**	**100.0**

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B. Additional Education Needs

A question intended for all students asks if the student has additional education needs. This was designed to establish the total number and the percentage of students who have additional needs, whether these arise because of a disability, disorder or health impairment or for other reasons. Chart 6 establishes that 1209 students are deemed to have additional education needs, or 53 per cent of all students for whom we have information on this variable. Although comparable data for the Nova Scotia (mainstream) student population as a whole is not available[9], this is a very high

[9] See the section below, however, which discusses comparative data from other populations.

percentage by any standard. It indicates there is much work to be done to address the education problems faced by Mi'kmaq students.

Chart 6
Does Student Have Additional Education Needs?

Does Student Have Additional Education Needs?	Frequency	Per Cent
Yes	1209	53.0
No	1071	47.0
Total	**2280**	**100.0**

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The following tables help to clarify the nature of the issues involved. First, we learn from Chart 7 that students face learning difficulties whether they go to school on reserve or off. Indeed, 58 per cent of those attending provincial schools are thought to have additional education needs, compared to 51 per cent going to school on reserve.

Chart 7
Student Has Additional Education Needs
by Location of School

If we look at this question by grade level (Chart 8), we see that in the kindergarten and primary grades, the percentage of students with additional needs stands at 31 per cent and the figure rises quickly to 56 and 60 per cent in the early years of elementary school. There isn't a significant drop as junior and senior high is reached.

Chart 8
Student Has Additional Education Needs
by Grade of Student (Grouped Grades)

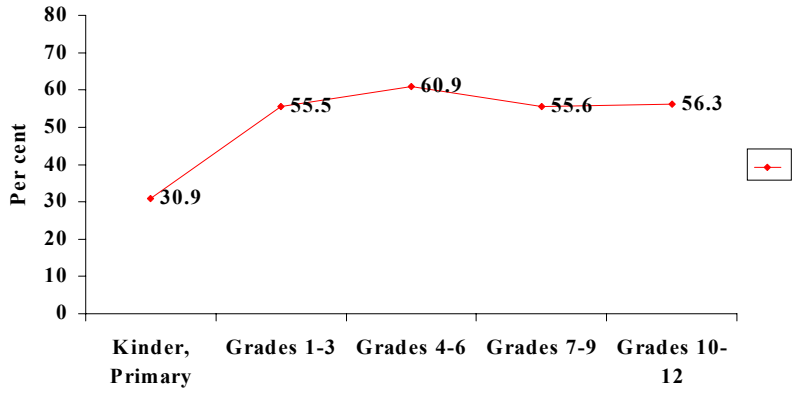

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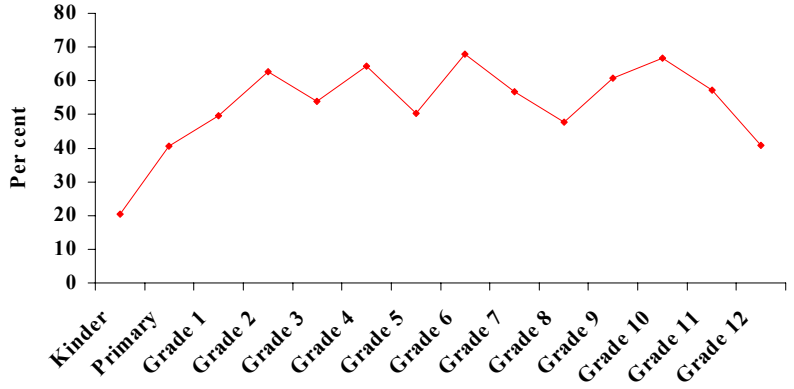
Chart 9 paints a similar picture. In this case, figures are given for each individual grade. While there is more fluctuation from one grade to the next, the two interesting patterns are, once again, the rise in the percentage of students with additional needs in the early years, and the decrease at the other end of the spectrum. There seems to be a substantial drop after Grade 10, perhaps because the students in educational difficulty are taking advantage of the earliest available opportunity to leave the school system.

Chart 9
Student Has Additional Education Need
by Each Grade



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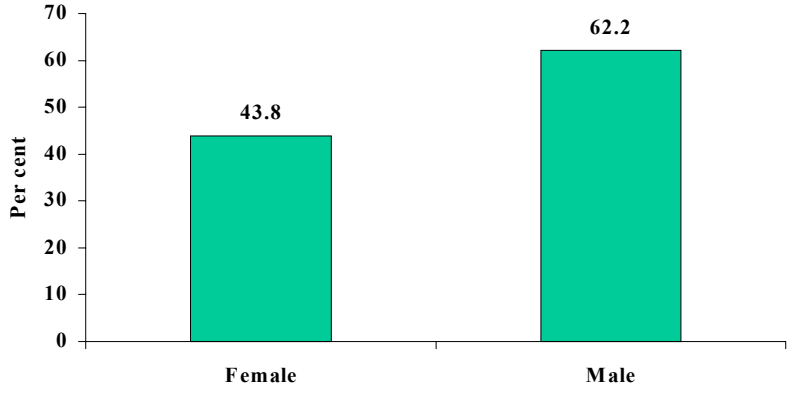
Male students are quite a bit more likely to have additional education needs compared to female students. In fact, the ratio is 62 per cent for males and 44 per cent for females (Chart 10).

Chart 10
Student Has Additional Education Need
by Gender



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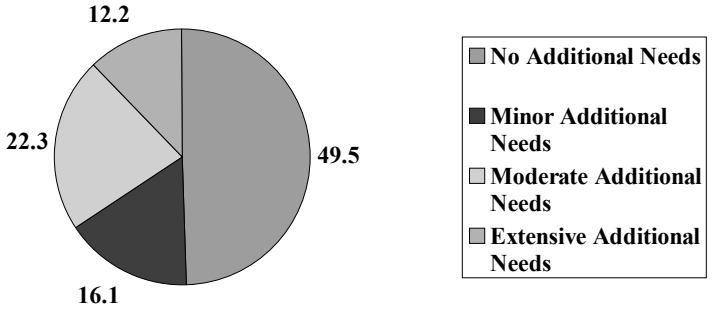
C. Severity of Additional Education Needs

We now turn to the information about the severity of the education needs required by the student. In filling out this portion of the form, the educators had access to an information sheet which described in some detail how to make the judgement about the severity of the need faced by the student.

Looking only at the students with additional education needs, in 32 per cent of the cases, the additional education need is only minor. It is judged to be moderate in 44 per cent of the cases, and extensive in 24 per cent. Looking at all M-K students, Chart 11 summarizes the situation with respect to the percentage of M-K students who either have no additional education needs (49.5%)[10], or who have additional needs by degree of severity (minor 16.1%; moderate 22.3%; extensive 12.2%). We note that just over a third of the M-K students can be described as having either moderate or severe additional education needs.

Chart 11
All M-K Students
Severity of Additional Education Needs



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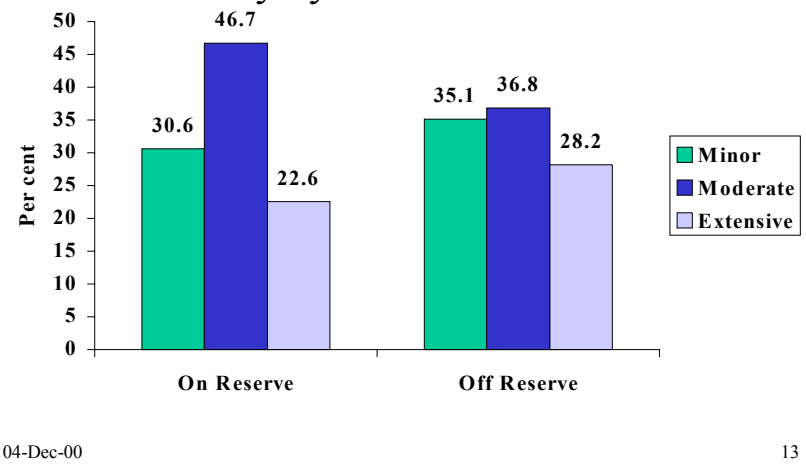
According to Chart 12, a student with minor and extensive needs is somewhat more likely to be found in the provincial system, in an off-reserve school, than on-reserve. The situation is reversed for students with moderate needs. It is possible that students with more severe needs would be drawn to the provincial system if it is the case that services for such students might be more readily available off-reserve, in schools that have been established for a long time.

Chart 12
Student Has Additional Education Needs
Severity by Location of School



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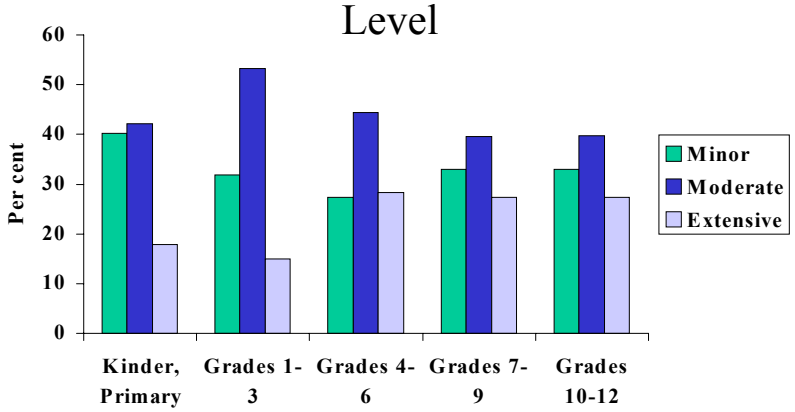
The severity of education needs tends to increase in the early years of education. With regard to moderate needs, for example, the largest increase is evident in the transition between kindergarten/primary and grades 1-3, after which the percentage declines a bit. The largest jump in extensive needs occurs with the next grouping, from grades 1-3 to grades 4-6[11]. (Chart 13). The results in this table could be signaling the possibility that interventions on moderate conditions are not being effectively made in the early years, with the result that the conditions

[10] In Chart 6, it was reported that 47 per cent of the M-K students were judged not to have additional education needs. The figure in Chart 11 is a bit higher because the data comes from a different question than was the case with Chart 11, and the number of missing cases is not the same in the two questions.

[11] This conclusion needs to be treated with caution since we are looking at cross-sectional data. We have not followed these students over time.

develop into the severe category. Another possibility is that it takes some time for a severe condition to become evident or to be diagnosed.

Chart 13
Students With Additional Needs
Severity of Condition by Grouped Grade Level



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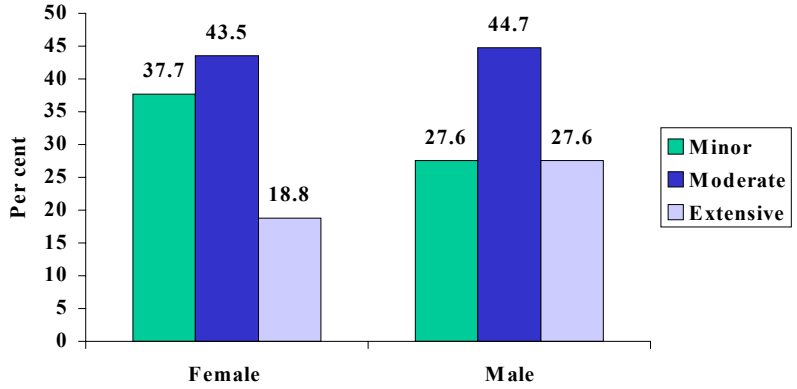
We have already established that male students are far more likely to have additional education needs than female students. In Chart 14, we see that male students face an additional constraint. They are quite a bit more likely to have extensive education needs than is the case with the female students – 28 per cent versus 19 per cent.

Chart 14
Students With Additional Needs
Severity of Condition by Gender



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D. Gifted Students or Students with a Disability, Disorder or Health Impairment

We were interested to learn whether students with additional education needs were in this situation because they were gifted or had a particular disability, disorder or health condition which affected their learning. If they did, we called them "Section A" students because that is how this section of our information collection form is labeled. Overall, we found that 46 per cent of all the students in the study were deemed to have a disability, disorder, or health impairment, or to be gifted (Chart 15).

Chart 15
Does Student Have a Disability, Disorder or Health Impairment , or Is Student Gifted?

Does Student Have a Disability, Disorder or Health Impairment , or Is Student Gifted?	Frequency	Per Cent
Yes	1068	46.2
No	1242	53.8
Total	**2310**	**100.0**

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However, only a small percentage of this group have been diagnosed by a professional to have one of these conditions; the remainder have been identified by school staff who think they fall into one of these categories. This becomes clear from Chart 16 which reveals that only 20 per cent of the students (212 students) falling into Section A have been diagnosed by a qualified person – that is, by personnel such as psychologists, doctors, speech language pathologists and so on.

Chart 16
Section A Students:
Diagnosis and Identification

Identification Diagnosis	**Number**	**Per Cent**
Professional Diagnosis	212	20.2
School Staff Identification	839	79.8
Total	**1051**	**100.0**

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The types of persons undertaking professional diagnoses are described in Chart 17.

Chart 17
Occupations of Persons Undertaking Professional Diagnosis

Occupation	**Per Cent**	**Occupation**	**Per Cent**
Psychologist	24.5	Hospital Medical Specialist	5.5
Reading Specialist	1.1	Pediatrician	8.7
Speech Language Pathologist	12.1	Psychiatrist	0.3
Family Doctor	29.0	Other Qualified Professional	19.0

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The remaining 79 per cent of the Section A students (some 800 students) have been identified by school staff. Typically this judgement is made by individual teachers or by a team of school staff (Chart 18).

Chart 18
School Staff Engaged in Identification of Conditions

Type of School Staff	Per Cent
Teacher	54.5
Special Education Teacher	0.7
Guidance Counsellor	0.7
School Team	42.8
Other	1.4
Total	**100.1**

The next issue is to pin down the kind of condition that these students experience. On the information collection form, there are nine different categories listed and each represents a particular kind of disability, disorder, health impairment or other characteristic such as being gifted. Again the persons filling out the form were given descriptive information about these conditions so that they could make an accurate judgement. In Chart 19, we see that, for Section A students who have been professionally diagnosed (that is, the 212 students), the most frequently mentioned categories are learning disabilities at 29 per cent of the total, and emotional or behavioural impairments at 24 per cent. The next most frequently mentioned condition is speech impairments and communication disorders at 17 per cent. Cognitive and sensory impairments follow at 12 and 6 per cent respectively. Gifted students are at 1.1 per cent of the total[12].

[12] Although our instructions to those filling in the forms tried to discourage this, nevertheless students in Section A were often deemed to have more than one disability, disorder or health impairment.

Chart 19
Students Professionally Diagnosed:
Category of Disability, Disorder, Health Impairment or Giftedness

Category	**Per cent**	**Category**	**Per cent**
Cognitive Impairment	12.4	Sensory Impairment	5.9
Emotional, Behavioural	24.0	Severe Multiple Disabilities	0.6
Learning Disability	28.8	Gifted	1.1
Physical, Mental Health Impairment	9.3	Autism Spectrum Disorders	0.9
Speech, Commun. Disorder	16.7	Other	0.3
		Total	100.0

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Continuing with data on those students who have been professionally diagnosed, Charts 20 through 28 provide more detail about the specific types of conditions that fall within each of the nine categories[13]. In Chart 20, for example, we see that most of the students diagnosed with **cognitive impairments** have been determined to have developmental delay. A few others have fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects.

[13] Again, more than one type is possible for a student.

Chart 20
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Cognitive Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Developmental Delay	28	Laurence-Biedl Moon Syndrome	3
Down Syndrome	2	Mental Retardation	2
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects	8	Other	1

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Students with an **emotional or behavioural impairment** are most likely to be suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity or attention deficit disorders. Some others have conduct or anxiety disorders, or depression (Chart 21).

Chart 21
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Emotional Behavioural Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Attention Deficit Disorder	16	Depression	10
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity	47	Eating Disorders	2
Anxiety Disorders	7	Elective Mutism	2
Attachment Disorders	1	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	3
Conduct Disorders	22	Tic Disorders	0

Among students professionally diagnosed with **learning disabilities**, there are three types of conditions that stand out: problems with basic reading skills, reading comprehension and written expression. (Chart 22).

Chart 22
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Learning Disabilities

Type	Number	Type	Number
Reading Comprehension	75	Mathematical Reasoning	7
Basic Reading Skills	78	Listening Comprehension	7
Written Expression	77	Oral Expression	5
Mathematical Calculation	7	Fine Motor Skills	0
05-Dec-00			23

For students with a **physical or health impairment**, the most frequently occurring condition is one known as "medically fragile" (Chart 23). Asthma is next in order of importance.

Chart 23
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Physical/health Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Asthma	6	Spinal Cord Injury	0
Cerebral Palsy	3	Traumatic Brain Injury	1
Muscular Dystrophy	0	Medically Fragile	16
Seizure Disorders	5		
Spina Bifida	3		
05-Dec-00			24

Students with a **communication or speech impairment** are typically troubled by problems with articulation, with language delay and with a condition described as a receptive and expressive language disorder (Chart 24).

Chart 24
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Speech Impairment or Communication Disorder

Type	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**
Articulation	27	Stuttering	3
Language Delay	20	Voice Disorders	3
Receptive & Expressive Language Disord	30		

05-Dec-00 25

Those with a **sensory impairment** are afflicted with a visual impairment most often, followed by hearing difficulties (Chart 25).

Chart 25
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Sensory Impairment

Type	Number
Blind	0
Visually Impaired	13
Deaf	3
Hard of Hearing	7

05-Dec-00 26

There are only few students in these schools who have a **severe multiple disability**, who have been officially diagnosed as being **gifted or academically advanced**, or who have a type of **autism spectrum disorder** (Charts 26, 27 and 28 respectively).

Chart 26
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Severe Multiple Disability

Type	**Number**
Deaf – Blind	0
Severe Multiple Disabilities	2

Chart 27
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Giftedness

Type	**Number**
Gifted	3
Academically Advanced	2

Chart 28
Students Professionally Diagnosed
Type of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Type	Number	Type	Number
Autism	2	Pervasive Developmental Disorders	1
Asperger's Syndrome	0	Tourette Syndrome	0
Childhood Disintegrative Disorders	0	Retts Syndrome	0

09-Dec-08 29

We now take a second look at the information about Section A conditions, but this time we include all the students who fall into Section A – not only those who have been professionally diagnosed but also those who the school staff believe have a condition that warrants their inclusion in Section A. Now the charts include a much larger group of students, as explained above.

First, Chart 29 gives the percentage of Section A students who fall into each of the 9 categories. Again, learning disabilities and emotional/behavioural impairments are the most frequently mentioned categories, but this time the percentage falling into the learning disabilities category (46 per cent) is much larger that it was in Chart 19 when we were reporting on only those students who had been professionally diagnosed (29 per cent with learning impairments). Obviously, the teaching staff is identifying a large number of students with learning difficulties. It is interesting, too, that the proportion of students described as being gifted more than doubles (from 1.1 per cent to 2.3) when the teachers' judgements are included.

Chart 29
All Section A Students: Category of Disability, Disorder, Health Impairment or Giftedness

Category	**Per cent**	**Category**	**Per cent**
Cognitive Impairment	9.0	Sensory Impairment	3.8
Emotional, Behavioural	22.7	Severe Multiple Disabilities	0.2
Learning Disability	46.5	Gifted	2.3
Physical, Mental Health Impairment	4.3	Autism Spectrum Disorders	0.3
Speech, Commun. Disorder	11.0	Other	0.1
		Total	**100.2**

Turning to the type of conditions, among those with **cognitive impairments**, developmental delay is again the most frequent type but the school staff seem much more likely to identify the presence of fetal alcohol syndrome/effects than do those who have carried out professional assessments. This type of condition made up 18 per cent among those professionally assessed with cognitive impairments, and 32 per cent when students identified by school staff are included (compare Charts 20 and 30).

Chart 30
All Section A Students:
Type of Cognitive Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Developmental Delay	92	Laurence-Biedl Moon Syndrome	4
Down Syndrome	6	Mental Retardation	3
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects	50	Other	1

05-Dec-00 31

Students deemed to have **emotional or behavioural impairments** break down into these types. By far the most common now are conduct disorders, which make up 38 per cent of this category when the judgements of school personnel are included in the identification, but only 20 per cent of conduct disorder cases when the pool is restricted to those who have been professionally assessed (compare Charts 21 and 31). In Chart 31, the next most frequent types are attention deficit hyperactivity, attention deficit disorders, and depression. Anxiety and eating disorders follow.

Chart 31
All Section A Students:
Type of Emotional Behavioural Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Attention Deficit Disorder	59	Depression	44
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity	115	Eating Disorders	11
Anxiety Disorders	41	Elective Mutism	6
Attachment Disorders	15	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	10
Conduct Disorders	184	Tic Disorders	0

As we noted above, **learning disabilities** are the most frequent conditions facing those Mi'kmaq children and youth who fall into Section A, and not surprisingly the teachers and other school staff are particularly likely to identify these. Among all students identified with learning disabilities (see Chart 32), the three most important types are problems with reading comprehension, basic reading skills and written expression. Mathematical reasoning and expression follow, as well as listening comprehension. These results parallel the findings of the professional assessments (Chart 22).

Chart 32
All Section A Students:
Type of Learning Disabilities

Type	Number	Type	Number
Reading Comprehension	500	Listening Comprehension	54
Basic Reading Skills	521	Oral Expression	33
Written Expression	514	Fine Motor Skills	1
Mathematical Calculation	85		
Mathematical Reasoning	89		

"Medically fragile" is again the most common type of **physical/health impairment**, followed by asthma and seizure disorders (Chart 33).

Chart 33
All Section A Students:
Type of Physical/health Impairment

Type	Number	Type	Number
Asthma	18	Spinal Cord Injury	1
Cerebral Palsy	4	Traumatic Brain Injury	3
Muscular Dystrophy	2	Medically Fragile	34
Seizure Disorders	9	Other	0
Spina Bifida	6		

Among students with a **speech impairment or communication disorder**, the results shown in Chart 34 repeat the pattern we reported in Chart 24. That is, the most common type of condition in this category is a problem with articulation, followed by receptive and expressive language disorder and language delay.

Chart 34
All Section A Students:
Type of Speech Impairment or Communication Disorder

Type	**Number**	**Type**	**Number**
Articulation	99	Stuttering	15
Language Delay	62	Voice Disorders	4
Receptive & Expressive Language Disord	64		

05-Dec-00 35

Among students with a **sensory impairment**, again hearing difficulties and visual impairments are most common.(Chart 35).

Chart 35
All Section A Students:
Type of Sensory Impairment

Type	Number
Blind	1
Visually Impaired	19
Deaf	4
Hard of Hearing	22

05-Dec-00 36

The results for all Section A students show little change when it comes to the identification of students with **severe multiple disabilities** (Charts 36 and 26). In both charts, only two or three students are identified.

Chart 36
All Section A Students:
Type of Severe Multiple Disability

Type	Number
Deaf – Blind	0
Severe Multiple Disabilities	3

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However, teachers identify a larger proportion of students who are **gifted or academically advanced** (Charts 37 and 27).

Chart 37
All Section A Students:
Type of Giftedness

Type	Number
Gifted	15
Academically Advanced	24

05-Dec-00 38

Charts 38 and 28, reporting on **autism spectrum disorders**, show similar results, which is not surprising in that these kinds of conditions would require professional diagnosis.

Chart 38
All Section A Students:
Type of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Type	Number	Type	Number
Autism	3	Pervasive Developmental Disorder	1
Asperger's Syndrome	1	Tourette Syndrome	0
Childhood Disintegrative Disorder	0	Retts Syndrome	0

E. Students at Risk of School Failure

In section B of the information collection form, we ask if the student in question is at risk of school failure for reasons other than, or in addition to, the conditions listed in Section A. Examples of this might be certain characteristics or behaviours of the student, or of the home or school environment, which would place the student at risk. As Chart 39 reveals, 602 students were identified as being at risk because of Section B considerations, or 26 per cent of all the students in the study.

Chart 39
Students at Risk for Reasons Other Than Or In Addition To Section A

Student At Risk	Number	Per Cent
Yes	602	26.1
No	1708	73.9
Total	**2310**	**100.0**

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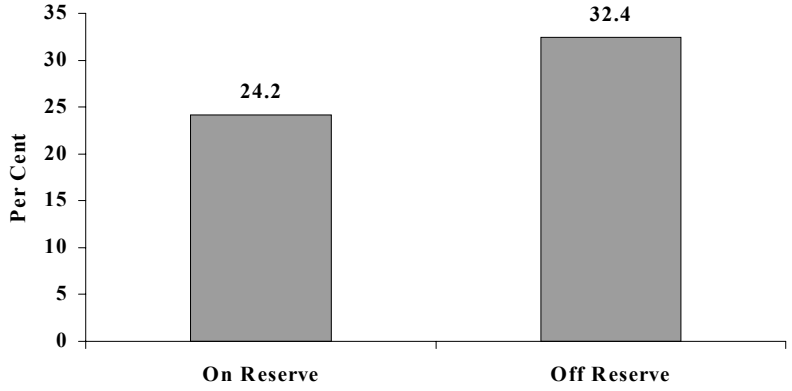
Students at schools located on reserve were less likely to be designated as being at risk of school failure than students going to schools off reserve (Chart 40).

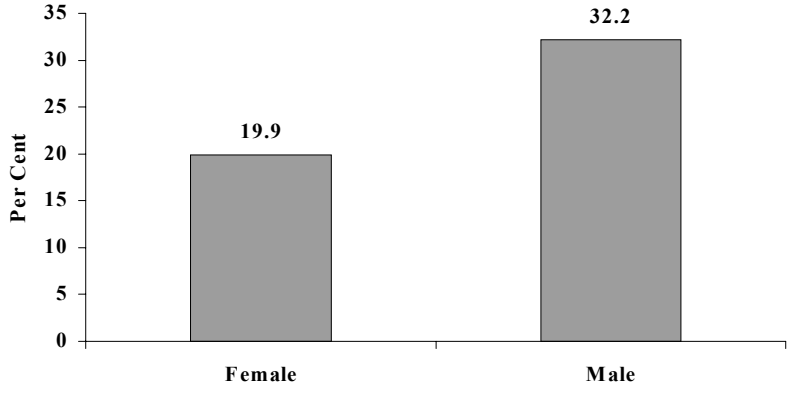
Chart 40
Student at Risk of School Failure
By Location of School



09-Dec-00 41

Also, male students were more likely to be judged at risk of school failure than female students.

Chart 41
Student at Risk of School Failure
By Gender



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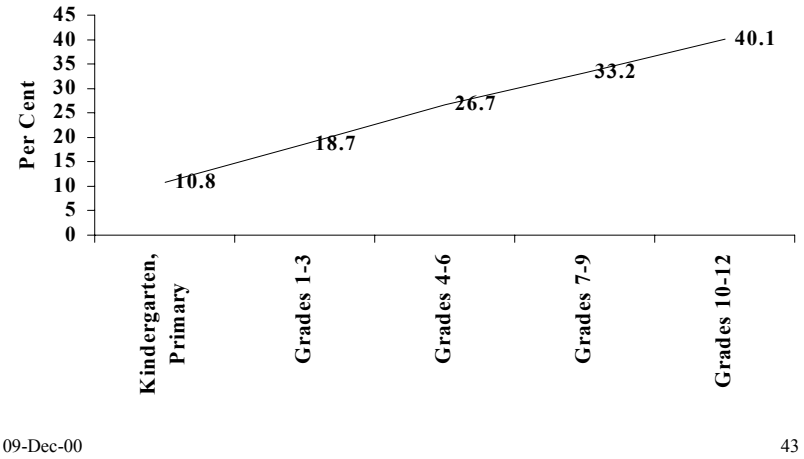
From Chart 42 we learn that the percentage of students at risk of school failure is deemed to be relatively low in the early education grades, but rises steadily as one moves to the higher grades.

Chart 42
Student at Risk of School Failure
By Grouped Grade Level



The reasons the students are at risk of school failure was spelled out in great detail by school staff when they filled in Section B of the form. We did not provide on the form a list of reasons to be checked off. Rather, those completing the forms were free to write in whatever reasons came to mind, and these were categorized in the process of data analysis. Frequently, more than one reason was given for an individual student, and Chart 43 gives the number of times each reason was given.

Chart 43
Reasons Student at Risk of School Failure
(Number of Times Each Reason Given)

Reason	Number	Reason	Number
Poor Attendance	260	Academic Deficits	97
Lacks Motivation	180	Student Health	96
Behaviour Problems	174	Family Lifestyle	36
Family Unstable	169	Lack School Supports	12
Lack Family Support	115	Other	31

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The most frequently mentioned reason for students being at risk of school failure is poor attendance. This is followed by lack of motivation, discipline or work ethic. Behaviour problems come next, and this includes a multitude of sins such as poor anger management, a defiant attitude, or abuse of alcohol or drugs. Having an unstable family situation was also a frequent response. In many cases, the student at risk was identified as having an unstable or disorganized family.

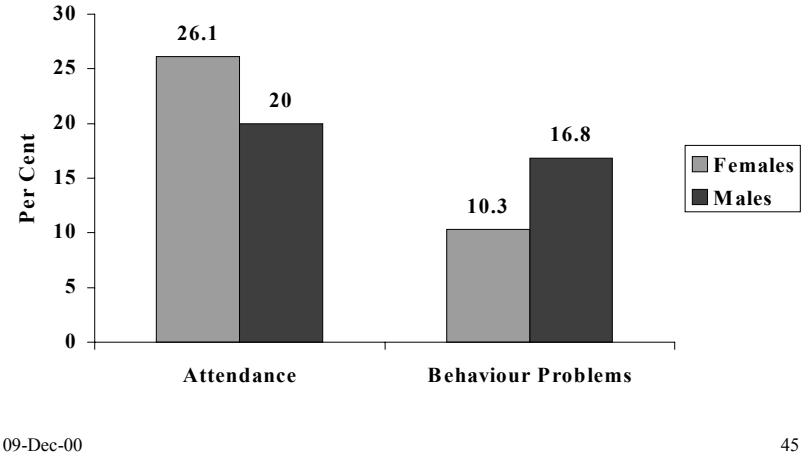
The fifth most frequent reason given was some variation on the theme of lack of family support. Often the reason was expressed in just these terms – lack of family support – but other terms used included parental neglect, high demands or responsibilities placed on the student, and lack of supervision.

The next reason given was the student having academic deficits, followed by health concerns. Family lifestyle also figured in the responses, with reference to such behaviours as the abuse of alcohol and drugs, or gambling.

These reasons all place the responsibility for being at risk of school failure on the parents of the students or on the students themselves. Those who filled in the forms seldom identified the school itself as failing the student – indeed this arose only 12 times when lack of school supports was identified as the problem.

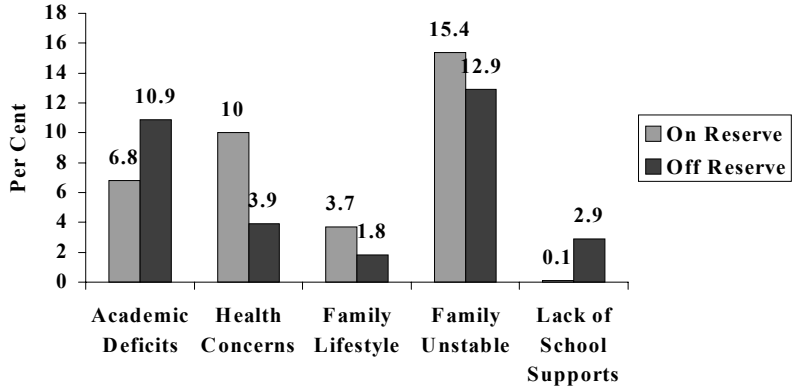
In the following charts, we look more closely at the reasons given for students being at risk of school failure. In Chart 44, for example, it appears that lack of attendance is more likely to place female students at risk than male students. However, male students are more likely to be described as having behaviour problems.

Chart 44
Selected Reasons By Gender



Students who attend school on reserve but who are at risk of school failure are more likely to be described as having health and family concerns than is the case with students attending schools off reserve. The off reserve students, however, are more likely to be described as having academic deficits and to lack supports from the school. (Chart 45).

Chart 45
Selected Reasons by Location of School



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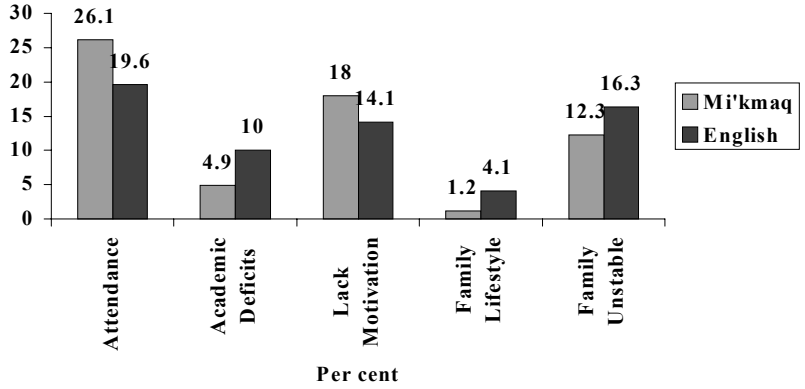
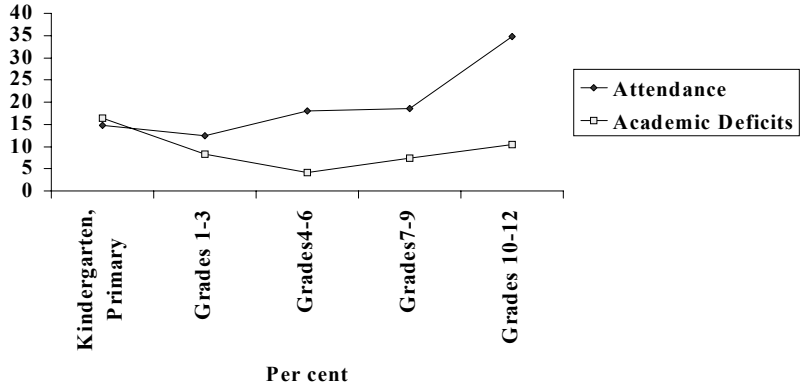
Students whose first language is Mi'kmaq are more likely to be described as having attendance problems and to lack motivation with respect to school. This may reflect a failure on the part of schools to accommodate and challenge students who are still strongly immersed in their Mi'kmaq culture. On the other hand, students whose first language is English are more likely to have academic deficits and to experience family problems. (Chart 46).

Chart 46
Reasons by First Language of Student



Some interesting results also emerge when one looks at how the reasons for students being at risk change in importance at different grade levels. In Chart 47, for example, lack of attendance climbs a bit in importance in the early education years, but takes a very sharp jump for the group in Grades 10-12. The importance of academic deficits declines as students progress in the education system until they reach Grades 7-9, after which point it increases again as a factor in explaining risk for school failure.

Chart 47
Attendance and Academic Deficits
By Grade Level



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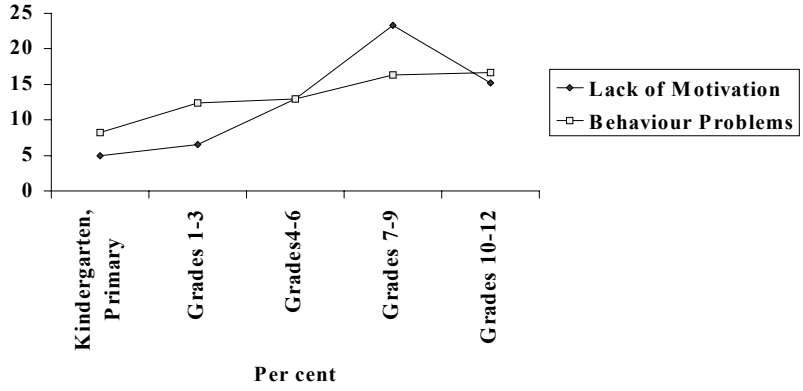
Lack of motivation increases in importance from the early grades through Grades 7-9, but then declines for those in Grades 10-12. Behaviour problems show a pretty steady increase over time. (Chart 48).

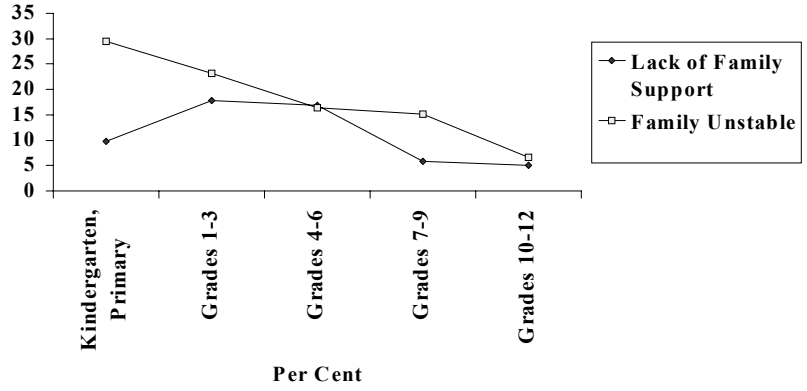
Chart 48
Lack of Motivation and Behaviour Problems
By Grade Level



09-Dec-00 49

From Chart 49, we learn that family factors such as lack of support and instability are more important in the early years of education, and become less important as students progress to the higher grades.

Chart 49
Family Factors By Grade Level



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In concluding this section, it is worth pointing out that many of the students identified as being at risk of school failure in Section B may already have been identified in Section A of the form as having a disability, disorder or health impairment, or being gifted. Indeed, further analysis yields the conclusion that most of these Section B students have already been identified as falling into Section A. More precisely, of the 600 students, 463 have been accounted for in Section A, leaving 137 "new" students.

The most common kinds of Section A problems (learning impairments and emotion/behaviour problems) are often the kinds of behaviours that are described in Section B. In other words, probably those filling in the form are often using Section B to provide further description of the learning difficulties, behavioural problems and family situations of students identified with a disability, impairment or health condition in Section A.

Comparing to Other Populations

Comparing results from one study to another, and one jurisdiction to another, is a difficult exercise. In the Canadian context, there not many contemporary studies of the number of students with additional learning needs, and the types of needs they experience, whether one is looking at the Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal populations. When studies do exist, some take a narrow, demanding, interpretation of whether a particular student qualifies as one who has a special need while others take a broader view.

Research methods differ as well. Ideally, one should take all students who might have an additional learning need and assess or test each student to determine whether he/she falls into a special need category. This is obviously a very time-consuming and expensive undertaking, and one which we could not pursue for budgetary and time reasons. Other methodologies might involve taking a sample of schools in a particular jurisdiction, having school personnel identify students who might have special needs and then testing a sample of those students. Another approach would be to count the number and types of students based on administrative data on the utilization of support services. Some studies are just not very well done from a methodological standpoint, leading to questionable results.

Our approach was to rely on information provided by school personnel to identify those students who, according to their informed opinion, had special or additional learning needs, including those students who had been professionally assessed.

As far as the overall student population in Nova Scotia is concerned, as far as we can determine, there is no study of the number of students with special or additional learning needs. As we noted above, the funding formula for meeting special needs is not based on a count and assessment of students who have these requirements. The closest we have come to a figure, and even this is not clearly defined, is a reference to the proportion of students in Nova Scotia who are receiving support services. A recent but undated Nova Scotia Department of Education document titled "Implementing Special Education Policy in Nova Scotia: Tracking Our Progress", includes the following statement:

> *Currently, 17% of students in the public school system are receiving support services from resource teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, teacher assistants and others. The involvement of parents, guardians, teachers and many other partners is essential for planning and implementing comprehensive and consistent approaches to students with special needs. (N.S. Department of Education, n.d., p.1).*

This figure is in the ballpark with those available for other jurisdictions in North America, but on the high side. A review of the literature by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), for example, gives a figure of about 10 per cent for North America generally, and 15 per cent for the province of Quebec (DIAND, 1998, p. 37). Data provided by the Department of Education in British Columbia for all students in provincial schools gives a figure of 10.7 per cent, using classification criteria that are fairly demanding (More, 1999, p.17). Based on this, it seems fairly safe to conclude that, for mainstream students, the proportion with special or additional learning needs is in the order of 10 to 15 per cent.

The available data for Aboriginal populations is much higher – usually two to three times higher than that for mainstream students. In Quebec, for example, the First Nation Education Council of Quebec completed a study among its member communities in 1992. The study concluded that 52 per cent of the First Nation children in First Nation schools had special needs.[14] However, the results are difficult to interpret because the study's methodology is not described in the report, other than a reference being made to a questionnaire that was given to the First Nation communities. The communities are also not identified.

In British Columbia, the provincial Department of Education has provided figures that compare the prevalence of special needs among Aboriginal and all students in the provincial school system. These figures lead to the conclusion that the prevalence of special needs among Aboriginal students attending provincial schools is more than 2.5 times higher than it is for all students in those schools.

[14] First Nations Education Council of Quebec, 1992. However, in a review of the study for DIAND, Paquette concludes that the actual figure is 42 per cent (DIAND, 1998, p.37).

The study completed by More (1999) extends the B.C. results by also adding data from a study of First Nation students attending schools in First Nation communities. The methodology of this study was, first of all, to select a representative sample of First Nation schools. As a second step, teachers in the schools filled in forms giving information about those students that they had reason to believe had special learning needs. Thirdly, a team of specialists undertook psychoeducational assessments of a sample of the students identified by the screening forms completed by the teachers. Finally, the study's research personnel came to conclusions based on the assessments and on estimates of the number of First Nation students with special education needs.

The study concluded that 21.7 per cent of the students enrolled in the First Nation schools had special education needs and fit into one or more of the relatively restrictive categories of special needs defined by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. This compares with a rate of 10.7 per cent of all students attending provincial schools. However, More estimates that an additional 7.2 per cent of the students in First Nation schools need significant special needs support but do not meet the criteria established by the B.C. Ministry of Education. They may, for example, have quite serious language and verbal processing difficulties, or emotional problems, but do not fit into the categories specified by the Ministry. With the addition of these students, the percentage of First Nation students with special learning needs rises to 29 per cent.

The 29 per cent figure for British Columbia is quite a bit less than the 53 per cent of Mi'kmaq students that we have found in our Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq study. However, it is worth noting that even with the additional estimates carried out by the research team in British Columbia, it does not appear that the B.C. results for First Nation schools includes students with only minor additional learning needs. If we remove this group from the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq results, the percentage with additional learning needs declines from 53 per cent to 36 per cent of the total M-K student population.

While figures will differ from one jurisdiction to another and in accordance with the research methodologies used, two conclusions can be made. First, as noted above, the percentage of mainstream students with special learning needs appears to be in the order of 10 to 15 per cent of

the total student population in North America. However, the only figure we have for Nova Scotia is a bit higher than that at 17 per cent. Secondly, it appears that the prevalence of special needs in the Aboriginal population is between two and three times higher than the rate for mainstream students.

Before leaving the B.C. study, two other conclusions from that research project should be noted. The first is that First Nation schools in British Columbia face much the same funding problem as do M-K schools in Nova Scotia. In B.C., More (1999, p. 5) notes:

> *Despite the fact that the incidence of special needs is much higher among First Nation students, First Nation schools in B.C. are provided with approximately $118 per student for special needs (FNSA/FNESC, 1997, p.7) far less than that received by the public schools. The money available for special needs '…is entirely insufficient for providing special needs services, yet it is also intended to pay for special needs assessments and language curriculum development' (ibid, p.7)*

Secondly, the nature of the special learning needs faced by the students attending First Nation schools in British Columbia are quite similar to those we have identified in Nova Scotia, although the categories are somewhat different. The most frequently identified special needs were in the area of learning disabilities and behaviour disorders. The author concludes that:

> *Language and verbal processing were the most pervasive difficulties of those students who were assessed. It was an element in the difficulties of almost every student.*
>
> *This was not an English as a second language problem. Follow-up with the schools indicated that English was the first language for almost all of the students.*
>
> *These results do not in any way suggest that there is an innate or genetic factor in this difficulty. It appears to be a result of experiential factors.*
>
> *Without a strong language base students will have serious difficulties:*

- *in learning to read and write*
- *in learning from reading or hearing spoken language*
- *in manipulating concepts in order to learn more complex concepts*
- *in talking about feelings as a way of understanding emotions*

Further study of the cause of this pervasive language difficulty would be very useful. But it is even more important to get on with the massive task of helping the students develop their language proficiency. In First Nations schools, programs of language development (oral, reading and writing) must be a very high priority for intervention. Clearly the home needs to be involved with this as well. Exposure to a rich language base (Indigenous language or English) is extremely important to pre-schoolers…

As well as helping students improve their language skills, it is important that teachers emphasize non-verbal teaching methods, in addition to verbal methods, to maximize student learning. For example, an effective approach is to pair language with other forms of communication (such as pictures, play acting, role reversals) to help the child understand what is expected. In the elementary grades, language/reading/writing must be the highest priority for the students – even if it means less time on other academic and non-academic subjects (More, 1999, pp. 30, 31).

Following the conclusion of the data portion of this study, which follows below, we return to the question of what should be done, in Section 5: Recommendations.

Conclusion

Taking a long-term view over the past 40 years or so, there have been steady improvements in the education of Mi'kmaq children, youth and adults. This is reflected in available data on the development of pre-school programs, rates of public and high school completion, and entry into and graduation from post-secondary institutions. There is no data, however, that makes the case that equality with the educational attainments of the mainstream population has been reached.

The results of this study indicates that there is still much to be concerned about, given the finding that more than half (53 per cent) of the M-K student population has additional education needs. Of the approximately 1200 students that fall into this category, only about a quarter (24.1 per cent) are said to have extensive additional education needs, while 44.1 per cent have moderate needs and 32 per cent minor ones. But minor and moderate needs have a way of becoming extensive in nature if helpful interventions are not made. In that sense, it is not an adequate response to focus only on students with extensive needs. The new education policy and funding framework needs to take this into account.

Fortunately, our study did not reveal many M-K students who have been identified or diagnosed with the traditional, stereotypical kinds of special needs such as those resulting from intellectual or physical impairments. Rather, the additional needs appear to arise from more social and economic causes. These include high levels of poverty and unemployment in the communities, some social problems affecting families, and the general lack of fit between school systems that are strongly tied to mainstream norms and practices and students who are brought up in a different culture and language than the mainstream. Although the school personnel who completed the forms did not often make a note of it, it is reasonable to suppose that part of the problem is that schools are still struggling to provide the kind of school environment that engages, excites and stimulates the Mi'kmaq students. If they were able to do this, or perhaps more accurately if they had the resources to do this, it would reduce if not eliminate the many cases of poor attendance and lack of motivation that came up so frequently in our results.

This study has identified the number and proportion of M-K students with additional education needs. It has also documented the types of needs and provided some clues to the factors that contribute to this situation. Thus the data results are also useful for strategic purposes – not only to make the case for better funding but also to guide interventions. At various points in the data presentation, we have been able to specify what types of students are particularly likely to have additional education needs and to be at risk of school failure – for example, males or females, those going to school on or off reserve, or students in the early or later years of their education. This information should prove helpful to those in charge of implementing preventive or remedial

measures, for it tells them who to focus on, what the most common problems are, at what grade level they arise, and so on.

Given the richness of the data base, more analysis along these lines (and more sophisticated statistical analysis) should be carried out.

Section 5 Recommendations

Study Overview

First Nations in Nova Scotia, as is the case elsewhere in Canada, do not have available to them a fully developed, culturally appropriate policy framework. They also do not have an adequate funding arrangement with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development that provides sufficient funding in an appropriate and timely manner to address the extensive special needs of First Nation students.

Without an appropriate policy framewo5rk and an adequate funding arrangement with DIAND, M-K cannot meet its mandate to give each First Nation student under its jurisdiction the opportunity to reach his or her academic potential by providing the facilities, resources and teachers required. These educational programs and services must be comparable to those provided by the provincial system. However, M-K does not receive the level of funding that would permit it to support comparable programs and services.

A further consideration is that policy and program development in provincial education systems continue to evolve. This is relevant to Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey because some M-K students are attending provincial schools. Other students may transfer from on-reserve schools to provincial schools in the future, or vice versa.

The study reported in this document has been undertaken in order to provide basic background information about special education needs to Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. More specifically, it has been designed to contribute to the development of an education policy framework for meeting special education needs, as well as the development of the programs, services and levels of funding required.

In this study, we have:

- Reviewed the changing approaches that have been developed historically to educate students with special needs, both for mainstream and First Nation students (Section 1)

- Documented the policy shift that has taken place in Nova Scotia and in some other provinces. This has meant a change from an approach that focused on testing/assessing students for the purpose of placing them into special education needs categories, to one that emphasizes assessing students for the purpose of determining what their education needs are what education responses need to be provided (Section 1)

- Documented the inadequacy of the policy framework currently available to First Nations, with particular attention to the guidelines for funding special education used by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Section 2)

- Compared the advantages and disadvantages of two approaches or policy frameworks for special education – the approach taken by the Province of Nova Scotia, and that being developed by the First Nations Education Council of Quebec (Section 3)

- Reviewed 6 different models for determining the funding of programs and services for special education (Section 3)

- Carried out and reported the results of a major study of the special education needs of Mi'kmaw students from the nine communities who come under the M-K umbrella (Section 4).

Recommendations

As we conclude this report, we turn to the formulation of certain recommendations that flow from the material presented in the previous sections. The authors, in consultation with the M-K

Education Directors and its Special Education Sub-Committee, have developed these recommendations.

1. Developing a Policy Framework for Special Education

As noted above, a fully developed, culturally appropriate framework for meeting special education needs is not yet available for M-K students. This must be developed, keeping in mind that any policy framework developed for M-K students should be consistent with, if not the same as, the Nova Scotia policy framework.

The approach that is developed should be an inclusive rather than a categorical approach. It should avoid labelling students by placing them into categories. It should also emphasize the allocation of scarce resources to identifying and implementing the interventions that are necessary for the student with special education needs to do well in the school environment, more so than using those resources to assess students in order to allocate them to categories.

We therefore recommended that:

1.1 M-K develop, with community participation, a comprehensive and culturally appropriate special education policy. Such a policy should draw on the Nova Scotia Special Education Policy Manual as well as the special education policy documents being developed by the Assembly of First Nations and other Aboriginal organizations in other parts of Canada.

2. Funding

At present, M-K receives $216 per student on its nominal roll to meet special education requirements. The amount allocated for special education in the provincial school system in 1998-99 is $265.50 per student and, as we noted above, actual spending averages $409. M-K students are therefore disadvantaged in at least two respects. They have available to them quite a

bit less per student than the provincial boards make available to their students, and Nova Scotia is also near the bottom of the list among Canadian provinces when it comes to overall spending per pupil on education (Appendix I). At the same time, the proportion of Mi'kmaq students with special education needs is two to three times higher than is the case for the province. The bottom line for the Mi'kmaq is that a lot less money is available to meet a lot more special education needs.

While clearly more funding is needed if M-K is to meet the requirements of its mandate and if all Mi'kmaq students are to reach their full academic potential, just what the amount needs to be requires more study. Several aspects need to be examined more closely, including the following:

- Costing out the recommendations in this report in the context of the number and types of special education needs that our study has documented

- Determining how the province has established its funding formula, a matter that should be clarified with the provincial funding formula review committee

- Establishing the kinds of programs and services that are required to meet the two standards that are mandated for M-K, namely, what is required to meet provincial standards and what is required for all Mi'kmaq students to reach their academic potential

- Developing a funding formula that is fair in its allocation to the nine M-K communities, in particular taking into account the needs of smaller communities who would not be well served by a funding formula that is strictly per capita based.

We therefore recommend that:

2.1 M-K undertake a study to determine the specific funding requirements and the funding formula that will best serve to meet the special education needs of M-K students.

2.2 Once the study is completed, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development provide an increased level of funding for special needs education so that Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey can meet its legislated obligations.

3. Best Practices

Quite a bit of literature and accumulated experience is available to provide guidance on the kinds of interventions that would have a good chance of success in preventing or addressing the special learning needs of First Nation children. For example, Chambers et. al. (1998) describe the "Success for All" approach develop by Slavin and others, and apply it to an early intervention program for children at risk of school failure. Odden and Clune (1998) describe how school finance systems can be reorganized so that they permit students to attain high minimum performance standards.

These are just two examples of an extensive literature. In designing a strategy, a useful first step is to undertake a study of best practices, as revealed by the literature and by actual projects and programs in Canada and abroad.

We therefore recommend that:

3.1 M-K commission a study of best practices to provide guidance on the kinds of interventions that would have a good chance of success in preventing or addressing the special learning needs of Mi'kmaq children.

4. Early Identification and Intervention

One of the "best practice" lessons that has been learned is the importance of early intervention to identify and address special learning needs. Such interventions can begin as early as the time of

birth, and it is particularly important to identify and address special learning needs in the early years of schooling, from grades Primary to 3. Indeed, the Province of Nova Scotia is acting on this insight and is putting in place an Early Intervention program in the various regions of the Province.

For pre-school children, early intervention services should be family centered, culturally appropriate, and delivered in the home. For the early school years, our literature review has suggested that one of the most effective early interventions in the classroom is good teaching whereby the teacher intervenes in a positive way to meet the additional learning needs that a student may have. Rather than pulling students out of the classroom and referring them to special education personnel, it appears to be better for the latter to work with the teacher in the classroom, providing support and resources when needed. Other early interventions might include putting in place a Reading Recovery program.

For students with more severe problems, it is necessary to implement the program planning process and make appropriate referrals to services outside of the school. In some cases, parents may need help in finding the best ways to assist their children and to develop the skills to be advocates for their children.

We therefore recommend:

4.1 In developing a special education policy framework, M-K should emphasize early identification and intervention for children who are gifted or who have disorders, disabilities, and health impairments.

5. Teacher Education

As noted above, the role that classroom teachers play in identifying and addressing special learning needs is vital for successful interventions. In our discussions with educators of Mi'kmaq students, however, the message emerged that teacher education programs have not prepared teachers well for this task in the past. At present, teacher education programs in the province

devote at least one full credit to special education, as well as introducing material on planning for students with special needs in other courses.

In addition, teacher education programs may not be sufficiently sensitive to the cultural and social context of Mi'kmaq communities, and the particular types of additional learning needs faced by Mi'kmaq students.

We therefore recommend that:

5.1 The Province of Nova Scotia and the university teacher education programs take steps to strengthen the preparation of teachers in the area of special education. This should include curriculum changes so that graduates are better prepared to work in Mi'kmaq communities.

6. Professional Development for Teachers

Classroom teachers need a great deal more professional development if they are to become more comfortable with, and more knowledgeable and skilled in dealing with, special education issues. Indications are that teachers in the on-reserve schools have considerably less access to in-service education than do their counterparts in provincial schools.

At present, some teachers are resistant to change in their approach to special education problems. Many teachers feel isolated from each other and they need to understand that they are not alone in dealing with the issues. They need to meet and network with resource specialists in the province. They need to learn how to work in teams in the classroom, rather than sending their "problem cases" to be fixed outside the classroom. These issues, and many more, could be addressed in professional development sessions. These sessions should be more lengthy and intensive than is normally the case – for example, it would be useful to organize weekend workshops and summer sessions on special education.

This does require funding, however, so that costs for travel and accommodation, replacement teachers when necessary, and for the professional development workshops can be provided.

We therefore recommend that:

6.1 An expanded program of professional development in the area of special education be made available to teachers of Mi'kmaq students in the M-K system.

7. Training for Teaching Assistants

A number of the M-K schools have teaching assistants who assist the regular teachers in the classroom. They provide a valuable service but they also need more training in the area of special education. A training program is available at the Eskasoni trade school, and this should be made available to teaching assistants during evenings or in the summer. Community colleges also have programs that could be made available.

We therefore recommend that:

7.1 An expanded program of training in the area of special needs be made available to teaching assistants working in M-K schools.

8. The Availability of Resource Personnel

The results reported in Section 4 have shown that there are large numbers of Mi'kmaw students who have additional learning needs in areas such as attention deficits and other kinds of behavioural problems, and learning difficulties in areas such as reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning. While M-K schools have some resource personnel available, more are needed to address the issues we have documented in this study. Launching programs such as

Reading Recovery, for example, is a labour intensive task, and a specialist can only work with a few students at a time in order for the intervention to be effective.

Schools also need to have access to personnel who can be used for testing or assessing students, especially those who need IPP's. Our data shows that only about 10 per cent of the students with additional learning needs have been assessed by a professional, and even in the category of students thought to have extensive needs, fewer than half have been professionally diagnosed. While we reject a categorical approach to dealing with special needs, and its heavy emphasis on testing for classification purposes, nevertheless there is an important role for professional assessment and diagnosis of learning needs. Professional assessments help in determining the strengths and needs of a student and are very valuable in the program planning process. Professional diagnosis of special needs is essential for appropriate medical interventions and assist in the school's understanding of the student. The Mi'kmaq community needs access to audiologists, for example, to test hearing, as well as to speech language pathologists to help remedy problems. It needs access to occupational therapists and other professionals for the expertise that they can bring to bear on the situation.

There are very few Mi'kmaq personnel who have the education and training required to provide these specialized services, whether in the area of assessment or intervention. In order to remedy this shortage, and to enhance the prospect of services being provided in a culturally appropriate manner, it is also important for Mi'kmaq students to gain access to and graduate from the university and community college programs that provide education and training in the relevant fields.

We therefore recommend that:

8.1 As part of the policy framework for special education, funds be provided to improve the availability of resource personnel within M-K schools. In addition, M-K schools need better access to teams of specialists who can provide testing for students with special needs, especially those with extensive special needs for whom IPP's need to be prepared.

8.2 M-K work with the leaders of professional education programs relevant to special education at the university and community college level in order to increase the number of Mi'kmaq students who are admitted to and graduate from those programs.

9. Support for Families

Our results have shown that a large number of students who are at risk of school failure are thought to be in this situation because they are not receiving the supports they require at home. Many parents for their part would like to support their children in school, but do not have the resources to be able to do so. Measures such as the following would help to address this situation:

- Providing workshops for families to improve parenting skills
- Making available resource kits to parents that can be given out at the time that students register for their classes
- Providing resource centers where parents can come to read with their children, and book buddy programs
- Engaging school personnel to work with parents on issues such as motivation, attendance, or discipline
- Making adult education programs more readily available to parents so that they can, for example, role model their commitment to education, or take high school-level courses if needed so that they can tutor their children

When it comes to working with parents, the issues that arise go beyond the narrowly educational, and other agencies in the community have a mandate and expertise that is also relevant. Health personnel, for example, need to be involved as well because poor health practices, such as

smoking during pregnancy or in the home, or not breast-feeding babies, can result in health problems and learning difficulties on the part of the child. In some cases, an intervention with families may require the expertise and resources of family and children's services, or alcohol and drug personnel, or those dealing with employment and economic development.

The issues we have described in this report require a total community solution. It is important, therefore, that any approach to providing supports for families be developed and implemented in conjunction with other community agencies. Among the Cape Breton reserves, an inter-agency approach is beginning to take shape and needs not only to be strengthened but also implemented in other parts of the province.

We therefore recommend that:

9.1 M-K develop, in cooperation with other Mi'kmaq agencies, an integrated program of support for Mi'kmaq families that would ensure that Mi'kmaq children and youth receive the support they require in order to reach their full academic potential.

10. Increasing the Schools' Connection to Parents and the Community

Teachers and other school personnel are much more likely to be able to address the learning needs of students if they have the support and advice of parents. However, the task of increasing the involvement of parents in the schools their children attend, and in their children's education, can be a difficult assignment. The standard approach is to create parent-teacher associations, or school advisory councils where parents are represented. There may be some scope for adopting or extending these organizational forms for the schools or school districts attended by Mi'kmaq students.

More innovative measures may also need to be taken. The Eskasoni School Board, for example, has a family visit policy which requires each teacher to make an annual visit to the home of the parents of children they teach, or in some cases, at least to make a positive phone call. Grade 8

students are also engaged in interdisciplinary study units on such topics as the ocean, and the excitement that they feel as a result of their involvement spreads to their parents, who are delighted to attend a celebratory event marking the end of the study module. However it is done, it is clear that parents need to be more involved in the education of their children and in the schools their children attend.

While it is true that the schools have a leading role to play in addressing the educational issues identified in this report, it is also the case that they cannot do it alone. The community needs to be involved in the schools, and the latter need to be part of the community, as a meeting place, and as a location where adults can access resources for further education.

We therefore recommend that:

10.1 Schools attended by M-K students make a concerted effort to increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children and of schools in the life of the community.

11. Developing a Protocol for a Continuing Relationship with the Province on Special Needs Education

In the course of conducting this study, we learned of a number of initiatives taken by the Province of Nova Scotia that have a direct impact on special education. This includes the development of the policy framework on special education, curriculum development initiatives, plans to undertake provincial assessments of students, the review of the provincial formula for funding special needs education, the early intervention initiative, the availability of a new document to guide resource teachers, and so on. These developments affect Mi'kmaq students in part because many go to school off reserve in provincial schools, and also because in various ways the Mi'kmaq education system is tied to provincial standards. If Mi'kmaq schools, for example, wish to award provincial certificates signifying that a student has successfully completed Grade 12, then they are subject to the province's student assessment procedures

mentioned above. Yet the tests may be culturally biased, or otherwise inappropriate to the reserve context.

This underlines the need for ongoing sharing of information and consultation between the Mi'kmaq and the provincial education systems on matters such as special needs education.

We therefore recommend that:

11.1 M-K develop a protocol with the Nova Scotia government for the ongoing sharing of information and consultation on issues of mutual concern in the area of special needs education.

12. Supporting Policy Change at the National Level

Several organizations are cooperating at the national level to develop a new policy and funding framework for First Nations special education. In support of this national effort, it is important for regions to share their information.

We therefore recommend that:

12.1: After the M-K Board has approved the release of this report, a copy should be forwarded to the Assembly of First Nations to assist in the process of policy and funding development at the national level.

13. An Ongoing Role for the Special Education Sub-Committee

If the recommendations in this report are accepted, it is clear that there is an ongoing need for the M-K's Special Education Sub-committee to continue its work. This would involve matters such as the development of a policy framework, overseeing the research on funding requirements and best practices, developing an integrated program of support for Mi'kmaq parents, and so on.

We therefore recommend that:

13.1 M-K's Special Education Sub-committee continue in existence and be the primary vehicle to oversee the implementation of the recommendations that arise from this report.

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Appendix A: Severity of Additional Educational Needs Guide

Appendix B: Summary of Major Advantages and Disadvantages of Alternate Methods of Funding Special Education in FNEC Communities

(Source: Paquette, 1999)

TYPE OF FUNDING	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Flat Grant	**1. Simple** **2. Easily understood** **3. Relatively light administration and reporting burden**	**1. Incentive to label students (although not to "over-label" them)** **2. Takes no account of differences in special Need types and their associated cost** **3. Disadvantages those with over-average needs And costs** **4. Responds over time only to changes in total number of special-needs students**
Pupil Weighting	**1. Ensures that funding will change with changes in identification** **2. Tends to deliver money according to need-insofar as needs is reflected in identification decisions!** **3. Responds over time to changes in total number of special-needs students and to changes in the distribution of special-need types**	**1. Maximizes incentives to over-label systemically** **2. Complex** **3. Often not easily understood** **4. Potentially inefficient** **5. Substantial administrative and reporting burdens**
Pure Census-Based	**1. Removes all systemic labelling incentives (completely unrelated to labelling and criteria)** **2. Simple** **3. Easily understood** **4. Minimal administrative and reporting burden**	**1. Does not respond over time to changes in total number of special-needs students or to changes in the distribution of special-needs types** **2. Disconnects funding from needs as reflected in identification decisions**
Hybrid combining pupil weighting for high-cost pupils in "hard" categories with census-based funding for lower-cost pupils generally in "soft" categories	**1. Low incentive to over label** **2. No incentive to label students in soft categories** **3. Simpler than using only pupil weighting** **4. Responds over time to changes in total number of "hard" category special-needs students and to changes in the distribution of 'hard" category special-need types** **5. Moderate administrative and reporting burden**	**1. More complex than pure census-based or flat-grant funding** **2. Takes no account of *differences* in "soft" categories special needs types and their associated cost** **3. Non-trivial administrative and reporting burden**
Hybrid combining pupil weighting for high-cost pupils in "hard" categories with flat-grant funding for lower-cost pupils generally in "soft" categories	**1. Low incentive to over-label** **2. Simpler than using only pupil weighting** **3. Responds over time to changes in total number of "hard" category special-needs students and to changes in the distribution of "hard" category special-need types** **4. Moderate administrative and reporting burden**	**1. Incentive to label students in "soft" categories (although not to over-label them)** **2. Takes no account of *differences* in "soft" category needs and costs** **3. Responds over time only to changes in total number of "soft" special-needs students**

Appendix C: Summary Notes of Provincial Special Education Funding

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SOURCE: Proactive Information Services Inc. 1998. The Manitoba Special Education Review. Manitoba Education and Training, Manitoba, pp.271-315.

Provinces and territories of Canada "use a variety of models to fund special needs education". They may include, straight block funding, categorical funding, a combination of the two and/or supplemental grants.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Provides per pupil core grant with categorical funding and operating grants

School districts receive funding from a variety of sources:
- special purpose grants
- targeted funds for specialized equipment
- provincial services provided by the Ministry of Education with no direct costs to districts
- services provided by other ministries with no direct cost to school districts

Individual categories of programs are not targeted for funding to provide flexibility to districts in meeting their priorities.

General Operating Grants

1. Core grants – standard amount of money per student, per school, per district
2. Targeted grants – funds for specific special education programs
3. Some services – block funded based on a formula – total student enrolment in school district

Special Education Funding is available for:

1. students with severe behavioural difficulties
2. specialists (speech pathologists, school psychologists, itinerant specialists)
3. school based learning assistance that support regular classroom instruction
4. resource rooms
5. special outside of school options (hospital & homes based services)
6. teacher assistant support
7. other provincial programs and services

Funding Categories were established to assist districts in providing appropriate education programs to students with special needs – the categorical system was not intended to identify all medically diagnosed conditions and syndromes

Preliminary Grant Amounts for 1998-99 Funding Allocation (Ministry of Education – B.C.)

(1) Core Special Education Services

- Funding for the District	$16,800,000
- Funding per school ($3,943 x 1,604)	$ 6,324,926
- Learning Assistance per school (6,916 x 1,604)	$11,093,886
- Educator Salary Adjustment	$ 8,790,284
- Geographic Adjustments	$ 524,690
- Amalgamation Support	$ 2,333,335
SUBTOTAL	**$45,867,121**

(2) Special Education Programs

- Learning Assistance	($132.00 per student)	$68,731,859
- Special Health Services	($39.45 per student)	$23,957,863
- Hospital/Homebound	($11.14 per student)	$ 6,764,989
- Identification/Planning	($20.72 per student)	$12,583,191
- Severe Behaviour	($6,014.00 per student)	$37,686,731
- Moderate Handicapped	($3,132.00 per student)	$86,878,651
- Severe Handicapped	($12,592.00 per student)	$95,529,208
- Dependent Handicapped	($32,042.00 per student)	$24,303,857
- Gifted	($341.00 per student)	$ 3,981,967
- JOB TRAINING		
*Mild Intellectual Disability	($744.00 per student)	$673,320
*Mod-Serv Profound Intel Dis	($744.00 per student)	$ 427,056
SUBTOTAL		**$361,518,692**
TOTAL		**$407,385,813**

ALBERTA

Three funding blocks are provided to school boards.

1. Capital Block
   – for the cost of school building projects

2. Instruction Block
   – school boards receive a per pupil allocation;
   - provides reasonable costs of instructional programs and services
   – includes the costs of principals, teachers, instructional staff, learning resources and supplies, equipment and furnishings
   – BASIC INSTRUCTION FUNDING includes special education funding for students with mild and moderate disabilities and for gifted and talented students
   – school boards use a portion of the basic instructional funding plus additional funding for students with special needs
   – ADDITIONAL FUNDS are available for a number of programs:
   *students with severe disabilities –includes:

⇨severe mental disabilities
⇨emotional-behavioural disabilities
⇨multiple disabilities
⇨physical or medical disability (autism, deafness, blindness)

*teacher assistants
*early childhood service programs

– students who receive funding for severe disabilities receive three or more levels of support and schools are required to develop and implement an Individualized program Plan for each student:

*frequent specialized one-on-one instruction
*specialized or adaptive equipment
*assistance for basic care
*frequent documented monitoring of medical and/or behaviour status
*direct therapeutic service at cost to the system

3. Support Block
- for operation and maintenance of schools, school board governance, central office administration, student transportation, equipment and facilities

Instruction Block Funding Allocation for 1998-99

(1) Basic Instruction $ 3,860 per student
- includes $325 per student to support students with mild & moderate special needs and those who are gifted and talented

(2) Students with Severe Disabilities
(a) severe physical-mental disabled $11,600 per eligible student
(b) sever behaviour disabled $ 8,910 per eligible student

SASKATCHEWAN

Special education funding is provided through three different mechanisms.

Base Funding

- the foundation formula is dependent on:
  -need (the cost to provide an acceptable education program) and
  -ability to pay (board of education ability to raise local money)
- the greater disparity between need and ability to pay, the greater the grant

Additional Block and Categorical Funding for Special Education

Additional funding protocols are available to meet the additional expenses of "exceptional students".

- Technical Aids
- Transportation

- Room and Board
- Accessibility
- Home-based education
- Fractional funding

Designated Disabled Program

- supports students with the following disabilities:
  *visual *mental *orthopedic *chronic illness *multiple handicaps *deaf & hard of hearing
- funding provided based on individual student need
- personnel must have specific qualifications and costs for program and services must approximate the level of grant received
- two levels of funding:
  - Level 1 rates for 1998-99 = $4,752 per student
  - Level II rates for 1998-99 =$7,088 per student

Supplemental Designated Disabled Program

- supports students with severe, low incidence disabilities who require extraordinary staff intensive programming
- an approved staff equivalent is calculated for actual staff identified by school division
- recognition of the staff in excess of the approved staff equivalent times $5,000

Special Needs Program

- supports programs and services for students with exceptional learning or behavioural needs
- includes students with:
  *learning disabilities *speech & language disabilities *mild & moderate intellectual disabilities *gifted learners
- funding provided as a grant based on the per capita enrolment in the school division
- one full time equivalent staff position is allocated for every 200 students enrolled in the school division
- for 1998-99 the unit value of the program was $27,500
- personnel include resource-learning assistance teachers, educational consultants, educational psychologists, counsellors, work experience teachers, social workers, speech-language pathologists and community liaison workers

Behaviour Programs

- provide services for students having severe social, emotional and behavioural disorders or for early intervention programs to prevent such problems
- division receives $10 for every student enrolled
- 10% staff identified for prevention programming & 90% are involved with specialized programming

ONTARIO

In 1998-99, Ontario provided a new model for special education students: "Student Focused Funding Model". It funds students according to their needs.

A combination of block and categorical grants is used to provide special needs programming and services to students.

Funding Framework

10 grants – the Foundation Grant and 9 "special purpose" grants

Foundation Grant

- school boards receive funding for every enrolled pupil to cover costs of providing core education to every student

Special Education Grant

- one of the 9 special purpose grants
- had two funding support structures

(1) Special Education Per Pupil Amount

– block grant based on total board enrolments

– for high incidence students have exceptionalities that do not require high level financial support for individual students

–1998-99 allocations:

*$347 per elementary student & $214 per secondary student

(2) Intensive Support Amount

– categorical – student specific based on the enrolment of individual students who meet specific funding criteria

– 4 levels

*ISA Level 1 = funding for individual student equipment costs in excess of $800

- can be used in combination with Foundation Grant + SEPPA or ISA 2 or 3

*ISA Level II & Level III = funding for costs of specialized programming for low incidence students

– ISA-2 = $12,000 – for students needing specialist teachers (blind, deaf) for 25%-50% of the instructional day

- ISA-3 = $27,000 – for students needing specialist teachers for 51% or more of the instructional day

* ISA Level IV =funding for students in government approved care or treatment facility

QUEBEC

Funding is allocated through block funding and additional special needs funding, categorized by the kind and severity of disability.

1996-97 – introduced new method of calculating number of required teaching positions – based on regrouping students with exceptionalities into 5 categories:
(1) at risk (2) language deficiency (3) psycho-social (4) intellectual (5) autism, physical and sensory.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Special education is funded through block funding on a per pupil basis. This funding framework minimizes classifications and avoids the use of categorical labels. It provides districts with the opportunity to plan and implement programs and services which best meet the needs of students.

1997-98 – each school district was allocated $315 per enrolled student.

NOVA SCOTIA

General Formula Grant – based on actual eligible student enrolment at all levels – Sept 30, 1996. The per student allocation is $3,447.06 – 1998-99.

Special Education Grant – grant to assist school boards with costs of providing programs and services to special needs students. The grant was based on the actual enrolment at all levels as of Sept 30, 96. The per student allocation was $265.50 in 1998-99.
Funds used for students assessed as having exceptionalities.

- cognitive impairments
- emotional impairments
- learning disabilities
- physical disabilities – health impairments
- speech impairments – communication disorders
- sensory impairments – vision – hearing
- multiples disabilities
- giftedness

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

School divisions are funded for 6.2 to 7.5 special education teachers for every 1,000 students.

Schools receive funds to provide programming and services to students with exceptionalities:

- severe cognitive delays
- severe psychological disorders
- severe learning disabilities
- severe emotional behaviour disorders
- severe health and neurological impairments

Funds are allocated on a per school basis for special needs students using the following formula:

- .5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for 1-2 students
- .75 FTE for 3 students
- 1 FTE for 4-6 students
- 2 FTE for 7-12 students
- 3FTE for 13-18 students

Funding is available for:

1. specialists to work with visually or hearing impaired students
2. speech & language consultants – 1 FTE for every 2500-3500 children
3. guidance counsellors – 1 FTE for every 1000 children

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Special education teachers are provided to support students requiring additional assistance within the school system: includes special needs students and students needing academic or resource support. In 1996-97 – there were 114 positions. The ratio for special education teachers is one for every 215 students.

Teacher Assistant positions support special needs students with mental – physical needs or those who exhibit behavioural problems. Support is also provided to pre-school and school age children with hearing impairments.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE REPORT – FUNDING MODELS

1. Redefine criteria for categories of support based on students needs rather than labels.
2. Provide specific allocation for gifted programming.
3. Retain a funding model:
   (1) based on some degree of partnerships
   (2) with flexibility to increase funding based on identified local needs
   (3) with the need following the student – recognize all expenditures required to implement programming
   (4) with categorical grants based on the level and type of student need rather than labels representing exceptionalities
   (5) that is outcomes focused rather than disability focused

(6) continuum of support and services for all students

YUKON TERRITORY

Special education funding uses a non-categorical approach that is based on identified need.

A central office support staff consists of:
(1) Coordinator of Special Programs,
(2) 4 school psychologists,
(3) 3 speech-language pathologists,
(4) physiotherapist,
(5) occupational therapist,
(6) itinerant teacher of the hearing impaired, and
(7) itinerant teacher of the visually impaired.

These consultants visit all schools on a regular basis and respond to critical concerns that arise.

By formula, 52 SE teaching positions are assigned to schools. Paraprofessional support is provided by 72 educational assistants assigned to the schools on a needs basis to assist in the implementation of student IEPs in addition to 24 remedial tutor or classroom assistants.

For 1998-99, special education programs had a budget of $1,117,000. Of this, $947,000 is allocated to salaries and $170,000 is “other”.

Appendix D: Student Information Form

Appendix E: General Information Document

Appendix F: Description of Special Needs Education Categories

Appendix G: Guide to Categories of Special Education Needs

Appendix H: Special Education Expenditures, N. S. School Boards, 1998-99

Board	Special Education Expenditures Per Student	Special Education as Per cent of Total Expenditures
Cape Breton – Victoria	$366	7.6%
Strait	$438	7.8%
Chignecto – Central	$384	8.2%
Halifax	$419	8.9%
Annapolis Valley	$492	10.3%
Southwest	$375	7.9%
Acadien provincial	$374	6.4%
Total	$409	8.5%

Source: Nova Scotia Department of Education, "Special Education Expenditures: 1998-99 Budget", Single sheet with data, no date. Halifax, N.S.

Appendix I: Total Public School Expenditures Per Capita, By Province

Province/Territory	Total Public School Expenditure Per Capita, 1998-99
British Columbia	$1067
Alberta	$1190
Saskatchewan	$1149
Manitoba	$1163
Ontario	$1289
Quebec	$975
New Brunswick	$1101
Nova Scotia	$940
Prince Edward Island	$899
Newfoundland	$1027
Yukon	$2203
Northwest Territories	$2707
Total	**$1148**

Source: British Columbia Ministry of Education, Inter-Provincial Education Statistics Project, Winter/Spring 2000, Table 15. The term "total public school expenditure per capita" refers to the total population of the province or territory divided into total public school expenditures for 1998-99.