

## **Metis Education Policy**

**Submitted to: The Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Roundtable**

**Submitted by: The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF)**

There are many determinant factors involved in the success of Metis students in attaining a post-secondary education. The Metis have received little in federal and provincial government support to assist our students, their families, and communities.

Below we offer a brief review of the major issues, successes, and challenges involved in Metis student access to a post-secondary education, their retention, as well as creation of a successful university experience.

### ***The Costs of Attending Post-Secondary University Studies:***

- *Issue:* Often coming from the working poor, Metis individual and family incomes are considerably lower than the Canadian average. Having the resources to pay the costs of a post-secondary education is an obstacle for potential and many current Metis students. Tuition and fees, books, and living expenses, and the need for a job to make ends meet, often make a post-secondary education inaccessible.
- *Success:* The MMF's Louis Riel Institute, in partnership with four major post-secondary education institutions: St-Boniface College; University of Brandon; University of Manitoba; and University of Winnipeg, has set up the Louis Riel Endowment Fund to assist Metis students with bursaries. The fund capital is currently approximately \$8.0 million.
- *Success:* The Metis Health Human Resources Initiative, a five-year program started in the 2006-07 fiscal year, provides funding for post-secondary
- *Success:* The Metis Human Resources Development Agreement makes funding available for the payment of the tuition for a student's final year of a university degree program.
- *Recommendation:* The challenge continues to be raising sufficient funds for scholarships and bursaries to meet the demand from our students for the much needed assistance.

We encourage governments and universities to continue to partner with the Metis Governments, such as the MMF, to increase existing Metis endowment funds while exploring other options to assist our students.

### ***Preparation for Entrance into Post-Secondary:***

- *Issue:* We need to ensure of Youth and adults are prepared to enter university or college upon high school graduation. Often they do not have the adequate grades, the appropriate high school credits or have not received adequate preparation in high school to successfully enter into post-secondary schools. Many students and their families lack supports and are unaware of the choices available to them and the implications for the students' future.

Improving access to Post-Secondary studies cannot ignore the factors that affect the student, impact his or her learning ability, and choice to continue study. Poor housing conditions, overcrowding, poverty, violence, and family commitments must be considered.

- *Success:* The Louis Riel Institute currently provides an adult learning environment so that students may attain high school credits thereby providing a foundation for further learning. In addition, the MMF has developed a number of Youth and Family initiatives including the "Standing Tall" program, as well as within Metis Child and Family Liaison Services, to address challenges faced by students.
- *Recommendation:* It is important that initiatives be developed and supported to improve Metis secondary school success, increase the number of graduates, and entrants into post-secondary studies. This includes Metis educational supports for K-12 including in school cultural programs, early learning, stay in school programs, childcare, family and adult literacy initiatives, mentoring and role model programs.

### ***Retention of Metis Students and Creating a Successful University Experience:***

Addressing the access and preparation issues, and overcoming the challenges outlined above, will go a long way in retaining Metis students and result in a successful university experience. Metis-specific mentorship and tutoring services, housing, cooperative learning and working initiatives and the availability of childcare is of the utmost importance to keeping students in school.

Currently the current "Pan-Aboriginal" approach is a liability to universities dealing with Metis students.

- *Issue:* Metis students do not see their culture and society present on the university environment. Aboriginal initiatives, including Student Associations, are in theory promoted as "Pan-Aboriginal," and therefore inclusive, but in practice are perceived as embodying First Nations priorities, identity, and culture, while excluding the Metis.

The same is relevant for the on-campus Aboriginal Student Centres. Metis students cannot identify with the overwhelming amount of First Nation imagery and

symbolism in the design and layout of the facilities. Metis students do not feel welcome.

- *Success:* The Louis Riel Institute provides a learning environment recognizing unique experience, culture and needs of Metis Students. With adequate support this success could be expanded to any university campus in Manitoba.
- *Success:* With MMF support, a Metis student group known as the CAMPUS Group was formed. In January 2007 the group hosted a first-ever Conference on Post-Secondary Education for Metis.

The group brings Metis students together with the universities, public and private sector representatives to promote discussion build relationships and generate ideas for Metis student participation, academic and employment success.

This is a first step in providing graduates, expected graduates and new students the opportunity to discuss the challenges and offer ideas for advance education and employment opportunities for Metis students.

- *Recommendation:* We offer the Louis Riel Institute be developed as the Manitoba Metis Education Centre of Excellence in partnership with Manitoba's governments and post-secondary institutions. In addition, the Louis Riel Institute is willing to develop and deliver university credits to students and provide other services to universities.

We welcome support for continuing the dialogue with our Metis students through the CAMPUS group and conference approach.

### ***Next Steps:***

On November 2005 in Kelowna, it was recognized by the federal and provincial governments that the Metis Nation, and its Governing Members including the MMF, must be working partners in education success at all levels including post-secondary studies. Metis Governments have both the jurisdiction and responsibility to address the educational needs of our Metis Citizens.

The Pan-Aboriginal model must be discarded and a Metis-specific approach must be used. The development and expansion of programs and services to increase access, retention, and overall success of the Metis post-secondary students needs to be undertaken with the Metis Governments and through Metis educational institutions such as the Louis Riel Institute.

We are convinced that partnerships between Governments, universities, and the Metis will prove to be a winning strategy for our youth and adults aspiring to a university degree as the first step in their future careers.