

## Chapter 4

### Section 4.05

Ministry of Education

# Education of Aboriginal Students

Follow-up to VFM Section 3.05, 2012 Annual Report

RECOMMENDATION STATUS OVERVIEW					
	# of Actions Recommended	Status of Actions Recommended			
		Fully Implemented	In Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented
Recommendation 1	2		2		
Recommendation 2	3		3		
Recommendation 3	2		2		
Recommendation 4	3	1	2		
Recommendation 5	4		4		
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## Background

According to Statistics Canada (2011), there are about 300,000 Aboriginal people living in Ontario, including 201,000 First Nation people, 86,000 Métis and over 2,000 Inuit. The most recent detailed Statistics Canada data from the 2006 census indicated that only 62% of Aboriginal adults in Ontario had graduated from high school, compared to 78% of the general population—a gap of 16%. This academic achievement gap is up to 50% for young adults aged 20 to 24. In this age group, only 39% of the First Nations people living on reserves had graduated from high school.

Many Aboriginal students face challenges that affect their academic achievement, including poverty, substandard housing and poor nutrition. Many live in areas with little prospect of employment, a circumstance that can affect how seriously they take their formal education.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) identified Aboriginal education as a priority, with a focus on closing the gap in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2016. It created the Aboriginal Education Office (AEO), which collaborates with Aboriginal communities and organizations, school boards, other ministries and the federal government, to co-ordinate Aboriginal education initiatives. Since 2006, the

Ministry has provided \$279.5 million (\$170 million in 2012) in funding to support programs for Aboriginal students.

In 2007, the Ministry designed a policy framework to identify Aboriginal students, help develop support programs and periodically assess their academic progress. The Ministry considered the framework to be the foundation for delivering quality education to all Aboriginal students who attend provincially funded elementary and secondary schools. However, in 2012, we concluded that the Ministry needed to more actively oversee the implementation of this framework to demonstrate what, if any, progress has been made since 2006 in improving achievement among Aboriginal students.

Among our more significant observations were the following:

- Five years after the release of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Framework), the Ministry had not assessed its progress against any of the 10 performance measures included in the Framework because it had not required school boards to evaluate and report on the measures. None of the three boards we visited (Algoma District School Board in Sault Ste. Marie, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board in Peterborough, and Lakehead District School Board in Thunder Bay) had done so.
- The Ministry has a guide to help school boards develop policies for students to formally identify themselves as Aboriginal. However, at the time of our audit, fewer than half of the estimated number of Aboriginal students in Ontario had been identified. The Ministry and boards need to identify Aboriginal students to better target funding and support, and determine their academic progress.
- The Ministry had not established a baseline from which to measure the gap in achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Accumulation of credits toward graduation is a primary indicator of student success. We asked the Ministry for the most

recent data for grade 10 credit accumulation for students who identified themselves as Aboriginal. Only 45% of these students were on track to graduate from high school, compared to 74% of the general grade 10 population. This raises the question of the Ministry's ability to meet its goal of closing the achievement gap by 2016.

- Although education on reserves is the financial responsibility of the federal government, many of these students eventually transition into the provincial system. Partly because of limited per-student funding, on-reserve schools have generally not been able to provide the quality of education found in provincial schools, and studies suggest these students may be several grade levels behind when they transfer into the public system. Our analysis of Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) data found that only half of on-reserve students attending provincial schools passed the Grade 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in the 2010/11 school year.

We made a number of recommendations for improvement and received commitments from the Ministry and school boards that they would take action to address our recommendations.

## Status of Actions Taken on Recommendations

Both the Ministry and school boards have made some progress in implementing all of the recommendations in our *2012 Annual Report*. For example, as of October 2013, over 33,000 students had self-identified as Aboriginal (compared to 23,000 in May 2012—a 44% increase), which allowed the progress of more Aboriginal students to be tracked. As well, in August 2013 the Ministry released *A Solid Foundation*, the second progress report on the Framework, which provides a

foundation or benchmark upon which to measure future achievements. With efforts to collect the necessary data well underway, the Ministry plans to measure its progress in a third progress report, which it intends to release in 2016. All three boards we visited, however, had begun implementing a number of promising initiatives to improve Aboriginal student achievement and were already measuring performance using EQAO test results of students who identified themselves as Aboriginal. The results achieved range from little change to significant improvement.

In March 2014, the Ministry released an implementation plan that was first proposed in 2007 to guide its activities and assist school boards in meeting the broad objectives of the Framework. The Ministry noted that the plan was developed in collaboration with its Aboriginal partners, district school boards and other key education stakeholders. We noted that, although more comprehensive strategies were developed for internal use, the Ministry's plan needs to be more detailed, as it reiterates much of the general direction proposed in the Framework and has not clearly identified the obstacles faced by Aboriginal students or outlined specific activities to overcome various obstacles. However, we found that all three of the school boards that we visited in 2012 had incorporated into their planning documents specific activities that address some of the key obstacles faced by Aboriginal students.

The status of actions taken on each of our recommendations is described in the following sections.

## Policy Goals, Implementation Plans and Performance Measures

### Recommendation 1

*To help Aboriginal students succeed in school and reduce the gap in student achievement as outlined in the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Framework), the Ministry of Education (Ministry) and school boards should:*

- *develop specific implementation plans that identify and address the key obstacles faced by Aboriginal students and routinely review and update these plans to assess what progress is being made; and*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *include in these plans specific goals and performance measures as outlined in the Framework and objectively measure and report aggregate results to determine whether any progress is being made toward improving Aboriginal student outcomes.*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

### Details

On March 5, 2014, the Ministry released the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan* (Plan). The 2007 Framework recognized the need for the Ministry to develop such an implementation plan to guide its activities and assist school boards in meeting the broad objectives of the Framework. In our *2012 Annual Report*, we recommended that such a plan identify the key obstacles faced by Aboriginal students and outline specific activities to overcome various obstacles.

The purpose of the Plan, as outlined in the document itself, is to identify strategies and actions to support ministry and school board implementation of the Framework through to 2016. The Plan outlines in general terms what the Ministry intends to do by then to close the gap in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The Plan also sets out, again in general terms, what the Ministry expects school boards to accomplish. The Ministry intends to review and update the Plan while it is under way and to adapt it in its second and third years of implementation based on the experience of year one. However, we noted that the Plan needs to be more detailed if it is going to guide ministry activities and assist school boards in meeting the broad objectives of the Framework. The plan reiterates much of the

general direction proposed in the Framework and has not yet clearly identified the obstacles faced by Aboriginal students or outlined specific activities to overcome various obstacles.

We found that all three school boards incorporated Aboriginal student issues into their various planning documents (including strategic plans, operational plans, improvement plans for student achievement and work plans). These plans outlined specific activities that address some of the key obstacles faced by Aboriginal students. One board focused on equity, inclusivity and diversity, and provided extensive training and professional development for students, teachers, support staff and administrators in these areas. One of its activities provided a basic understanding of the impacts of historical trauma on the community. This board also encouraged Aboriginal students to return to school, offering alternative programs and intervening halfway through the semester to ensure that these students have a program that meets their needs. Another board's improvement plans outlined several specific strategies and actions such as incorporating the local treaty into its native studies course, developing activities for First Nation students transitioning into the public system from reserve schools, and making announcements in the local native language. The third board included in its plans the key risks and obstacles faced by Aboriginal students, and a set of specific goals. For example, it dedicated a work study teacher to focus on helping Aboriginal students who achieve at a level 2 on EQAO tests to improve to level 3, the provincial standard. This board also planned to identify Aboriginal students who are struggling in literacy and provide specific support to help improve their success on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

In August 2013, the Ministry released *A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Progress Report). The report aligns with the Framework's guiding principles, as the Ministry intends to continue to

use the 10 performance measures outlined in the Framework as the key indicators to track ministry, school board and school progress. In regard to the Framework's measures for Aboriginal student achievement, the Progress Report establishes a baseline to assess these students' future progress. For example, the EQAO grade 3 reading results showed a gap of 20% between Aboriginal and all other students, with provincial standard achievement rates of 47% and 67% respectively. Progress to date in student achievement was not included in the report, but working from this baseline, an assessment of progress over time is planned to be done in 2016 when the Ministry intends to release the third progress report. For other Framework goals the Ministry reported specific results. For example, there were 13,375 students enrolled in native studies courses compared to 1,097 in the 2006/07 school year, and 50 boards had established First Nation, Métis and Inuit advisory councils by 2012 compared to 30 boards in 2009.

One board has been collecting data since 2008 and reports First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement in its board improvement plan along with specific EQAO targets for 2014 and 2018. This board has demonstrated steady improvement at all grade levels in EQAO testing for Aboriginal students and has substantially closed the gap, in particular, at the grade 6 level in reading and writing. For example, in 2006/07 only 32% of this board's Aboriginal students achieved the provincial standard in grade 6 writing compared to non-Aboriginal students at 53%, a gap of 21%. In 2012/13, Aboriginal student achievement improved to 58% while non-Aboriginal students increased to 62%, a gap of only 4%. Another board reports in its improvement plan grade 9 credit accumulation, which is a key indicator for success in high school. Since 2009/10, this board has reported a significant improvement (from 55% to 78%) in the percentage of Aboriginal students with eight or more grade 9 credits. This board also uses grade 9 and 10 credit accumulation numbers to determine whether students are on track to graduate and to identify

students who may need assistance. Since 2008, the third board has been measuring performance based on EQAO results as well as credit accumulation. At the grade 9 level and on the OSSLT, this board has achieved somewhat mixed results. However, since 2008, the board has achieved significant improvement in EQAO results at the grade 3 level and some improvement at the grade 6 level, with an overall increase in the percentage of students who have achieved the provincial standard of 13% and 6% respectively. The board has also surveyed elementary and high school students to identify specific concerns that may need to be addressed, including factors that may have an impact on academic achievement, asking about such matters as feelings of security in school, levels of depression and the student's sense of belonging.

## Voluntary, Confidential Self-identification

### Recommendation 2

*To obtain the population data necessary to better develop specific support programs, report on results, and identify opportunities to improve Aboriginal student achievement, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) should:*

- *develop standard communication tools and disseminate best practices to assist boards in successfully implementing an effective student self-identification process; and*  
**Status: In the process of being implemented.**
- *develop a policy guide for self-identification by Aboriginal teaching and non-teaching staff and oversee the effective implementation of this policy.*  
**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

*Both the Ministry and school boards should exercise effective oversight to help ensure that the student self-identification policy is being successfully implemented in Ontario schools.*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

### Details

Ministry data shows that by October 2013, 33,000 students had self-identified as Aboriginal, compared to 23,000 in May 2012, a 44% increase. The Ministry indicated that it supports internal sharing and analysis of self-identification data to track achievement for self-identified Aboriginal students and to monitor and report on progress in closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In April 2014, ministry staff participated in training sessions in providing leadership to the boards in the use and analysis of Aboriginal student self-identification data to support increased student achievement.

The Ministry continues to provide school boards with funding to support the implementation of student self-identification policies. The funding priorities for the 2013/14 school year were to increase student self-identification data use, analysis and sharing; enhance professional development and increased community engagement activities and partnerships; and increase access to Aboriginal languages and native studies programming and associated professional development. The release of project funds will be dependent upon the successful completion by the boards and approval by the Ministry of both the interim and final reports. In addition, the Ministry indicated that it will support strategies to increase the number of students who choose to self-identify and will share promising practices in the analysis and utilization of the data.

The Ministry has begun preliminary discussions regarding the development of a provincial policy guideline for voluntary staff self-identification through the Minister's Advisory Council Working Group that includes Aboriginal partners and key education stakeholders including the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Ontario Public School Board Association and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education. In addition, the Ministry is currently creating an inventory of school board staff self-identification policies to assess board progress in policy development and to identify best practices to help in the development of the provincial

guideline. To compile the inventory of school board staff self-identification policies, an *Aboriginal Staff Self-Identification Collection Template* was created that will be used in the 2014/15 school year.

To support the development of board-specific strategies on implementing student self-identification, the Ministry has assembled an analytical profile for each of the 72 district school boards. Each board profile includes:

- the estimated Aboriginal student population as a percentage of the total board student population;
- the year-over-year head count of self-identified students from October 2009 (first submission) to June 2013; and
- board-level results for student achievement indicators including grade 9 credit accumulation and all EQAO testing (grade 3 and 6 reading, writing and mathematics; grade 9 academic and applied mathematics; the OSSLT).

The Ministry will use the analytical board profiles to help communicate specific strategies to support boards in strengthening their Aboriginal student self-identification activities, supporting engagement with local communities, and improving overall Aboriginal student achievement.

One board's self-identification policy has been in place since 2007. For the 2012/13 school year, updated information on self-identification was sent to all schools, posted on the board's website and provided to the local Aboriginal communities. Also, the self-identification policy along with a transition document supporting Aboriginal education and career success is included in a *Welcome to Kindergarten* package provided to Aboriginal parents and students. This board believes that Aboriginal staff can act as mentors, share their Aboriginal culture and help foster an environment where Aboriginal students can reach a high level of achievement. Therefore, since 2008 the board has been sending out a communication every September asking its employees to self-identify, and during orientation it informs its new employees of the policy and gives them the opportunity to self-identify.

Another board's self-identification numbers have steadily increased over time despite overall declining enrolment. It revised its voluntary self-identification policy in May 2012 and it puts out annual communications promoting self-identification. This board indicated that training will be provided for head secretaries at all elementary and secondary schools to help registering students understand the policy and to provide information about how to encourage self-identification through the registration process.

The third board has had a voluntary student self-identification policy since 2007, which it revised in June 2013. Self-identification is part of the student registration process and the annual student information verification process. This board provides a pamphlet to parents outlining the benefits of student self-identification. In June 2013, it approved a voluntary staff self-identification policy that is intended to provide the board with baseline data on the number of Aboriginal staff currently employed. It is also to be used to improve services to students and enable the board to develop role model and mentoring programs with staff who share the students' culture and could foster a better environment for student success.

## Data Collection and Analysis

### Recommendation 3

*To help assess the progress being made toward achieving the goals and performance measures outlined in the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) and school boards should:*

- *establish a baseline with respect to the goals and performance measures identified in the Framework and set measurable, realistic targets; and*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *periodically review progress made with regard to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student achievement so that*

*additional or alternative strategies can be implemented where necessary.*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

### Details

As previously noted, in August 2013, the Ministry released *A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. This report includes Ontario's first baseline data on Aboriginal student achievement and uses student self-identification data for the 2011/12 school year. Using this data on student achievement, the Ministry anticipates convening discussions with Aboriginal partners and other education stakeholders in the 2014/15 school year to set measurable student achievement targets and then annually review the progress made toward improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The Ministry indicated that data is not yet available to track progress toward the goal of increasing the graduation rate of Aboriginal students. The Ministry intends to calculate a provincial five-year baseline graduation rate for self-identified Aboriginal students in 2016/17 (using the self-identified Aboriginal students who were in grade 9 in 2011/12) and monitor progress against this baseline in future years.

All three of the boards we visited in 2012 have been collecting various data on self-identified Aboriginal students for more than five years, and all three have achieved moderate to significant improvement in the performance of Aboriginal students on EQAO testing and other measures such as credit accumulation. All three boards have also set targets and have been measuring progress toward the achievement of these targets. The first board set specific targets for results on all EQAO tests to be achieved by 2018 and, given the improvements noted since 2008, the targets appear to be achievable. Also, the board's targets are identified in its 2013–14 board improvement plan, and in early 2014 this board entered into a memorandum of

understanding with two local First Nation bands regarding the sharing of data such as attendance, report card marks, EQAO results and the number of suspensions and expulsions. The purpose of the memorandum is to work collaboratively with the community to help monitor student achievement. The second board's achievement demonstrates improvement over time, although the board noted that year-to-year comparisons should be made with caution because of the small number of students. The third board stated that it was working with the local university on researching a junior (grade 6) mathematics assessment to establish a baseline that can be used to help improve student results, since the board's Aboriginal students have seen significant improvement over the last five years in reading and writing but not mathematics.

With the release of baseline data for academic achievement in the second progress report, the Ministry intends to review student achievement annually using EQAO scores and develop new initiatives to close the academic achievement gap. The initiatives and alternative strategies that are being delivered in selected school boards in the 2013/14 school year include:

- funding to 38 boards for secondary school re-engagement programs to hire staff with the knowledge and expertise to re-engage Aboriginal students who have left school but are close to graduating;
- implementing 13 elementary Aboriginal summer learning programs across 27 boards;
- collaborating between educators and local community partners at 16 boards to determine Aboriginal student achievement and well-being needs; and
- providing 13 Aboriginal instructional coaches in low-performing secondary schools who are knowledgeable in instructional strategies and curriculum content appropriate to the learning styles and preferences of Aboriginal learners in grade 9 and 10 applied compulsory courses.

The Ministry indicated that these targeted student achievement activities implemented in the selected school boards in 2013/14 are being monitored through report-backs and will be evaluated at the conclusion of the school year.

In April 2013, the Ministry provided funding to support a gathering of Aboriginal education leads. This conference was a professional learning opportunity for ministry staff, 80 Aboriginal education leads and other personnel from 40 boards to share and discuss best practices, strategies and ideas related to advancing the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. Also, regional board planning sessions were held in fall 2013, with focused questions and guided discussion around the needs of Aboriginal learners in all school boards.

All three school boards, as previously noted, are generating data to periodically review progress made with regard to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. These boards have also developed alternative strategies to improve Aboriginal student achievement. For example, in February 2014, one board committed to working with an indigenous education coalition on a research project to design collaborative strategies to enhance educational services for First Nation students. This partnership is intended to research promising practices to enhance student success through teacher training, resource development, community program development and data sharing. The second board established a 10-week program to increase appreciation of Aboriginal customs while helping students make positive choices, set goals and build support systems in their lives. The third board annually reviews student data for obvious trends. For example, in 2012/13, this board found that its Aboriginal students were having difficulty in history and geography courses so community members and resource staff incorporated a First Nations perspective into the curriculum for these subject areas.

## Funding

### Recommendation 4

*To better ensure that funding is allocated based on the needs of Aboriginal students, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) should:*

- *consider basing per-pupil funding on more current and reliable Aboriginal student enrolment data, as this could result in a more equitable funding allocation;*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *where funding is allocated in response to board proposals, document the underlying rationale for the funding and communicate to boards the justification for accepting or rejecting their proposals; and*

**Status: Fully implemented.**

- *implement report-back processes not only to demonstrate that funds are spent for the purposes intended but also to obtain information on the success of different types of support programs boards are undertaking.*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

### Details

Much of the supplemental funding the Ministry provides to boards for Aboriginal programming is given on a per-pupil basis, but the number of Aboriginal students per board is based on 2006 Statistics Canada census data. In the 2012/13 school year, the Ministry established an intra-ministry working group composed of staff from the Aboriginal Education Office and its own finance, accounting and statistics branches. This group examined the feasibility of updating the supplemental funding model based on available Aboriginal student self-identification data. The Ministry indicated that it will meet with school boards, Aboriginal partners and education stakeholders to assess the impact of updating the supplement in this way. In winter 2015 the Ministry will finalize its assessment of updating the per-pupil

component of the supplemental funding for Aboriginal students.

The Ministry implemented an enhanced template for school boards to help support a more objective and needs-based approach to funding project proposals for 2013/14. This project proposal template requires boards to include:

- a detailed description of the project;
- linkage to at least one of the 10 Framework performance measures;
- evidence of alignment with the board's improvement plan for student achievement;
- expected project outputs and outcomes; and
- a description of how the project will be monitored and evaluated to meet the intended outcomes.

The Ministry also implemented an enhanced evaluation template to support the selection of Aboriginal projects and provide feedback to boards on the funding they received in 2013/14. The Ministry indicated that the enhanced project proposal template and the enhanced project evaluation template will be used to document justification for project selection and provide feedback to boards going forward. Also in 2013/14, the Ministry revised its board reporting template, which is to be used to report evidence-based data on the success of projects and the projects' overall impact on Aboriginal student achievement.

## First Nation Students Living on Reserves

### Recommendation 5

*In order to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students living on reserves, the Ministry of Education (Ministry) and, where applicable, school boards, should:*

- *develop standardized template tuition agreements and guidelines that can be used by all boards and periodically monitor whether valid tuition agreements are in place with all bands;*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *take a more proactive role to encourage boards to share best practices to assist with the transition of students from on-reserve schools to the provincial education system;*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *separately measure the effectiveness of initiatives implemented to address the unique challenges faced by on-reserve students attending provincially funded schools; and*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

- *continue to participate in and more proactively engage in tripartite agreement discussions with the federal government and First Nation organizations.*

**Status: In the process of being implemented.**

### Details

The *Education Services (Tuition) Agreement Guide (Guide)* was created and released in 2013 by the Ministry of Education, the Chiefs of Ontario's First Nation Education Coordination Unit, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. The purpose of the Guide is to provide reference materials to assist publicly funded school boards and First Nations in developing education services agreements. As each tuition agreement is unique, the Guide includes sample components of a tuition agreement that First Nation communities and school boards may wish to adopt. In fall 2013, sessions were held in five locations across Ontario to provide an opportunity for First Nation communities and district school boards to build stronger relationships, review the final text of the Guide and discuss best practices in developing successful education funding agreements. All three boards noted that they had attended one of these sessions. Two of the boards later developed standardized education services agreements, and the other board reviewed its current agreements and determined that they conform to the best practices outlined in the Guide. Two of the boards had signed agreements with all the First Nation bands in their region. The third

board noted that it had signed agreements in place with 13 bands but was still negotiating with the remaining six bands.

In September 2012, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Chiefs of Ontario, launched an e-learning pilot project. This project will provide selected First Nation communities that deliver kindergarten to grade 12 programming with access, in their own schools, to the Ontario Education Resource Bank. This repository provides students and teachers with access to a variety of resources such as lesson plans, maps, articles and online courses from kindergarten to grade 12. Key elements of the pilot project include providing training, professional development and support to teachers in the First Nation school system. Its purpose is to better understand the requirements needed for the successful implementation of e-learning in First Nation schools province-wide.

In fall 2013, the Ministry invited First Nation educators to attend professional development sessions directed toward student achievement, which it offered across the province.

The Ministry has partnered with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to improve the success of First Nation students in provincial schools and help those transitioning from First Nation schools to the provincially funded system. Through this partnership, the Ministry supported three education forums where Nishnawbe Aski Nation educators and community representatives met with school board representatives to discuss best practices in developing and implementing transition programs. The partnership also created a student-parent communication guide that includes information for First Nation students transitioning from on-reserve schools. The Ministry is also supporting a research study to examine the effectiveness of counselling services for First Nation students and to make recommendations on student transitions to the provincially funded system. In addition, the Ministry stated that it has funded 81 projects that are intended to help Aboriginal students engage

at school both academically and socially, with the students using the *Students as Researchers Tool Kit* to research topics that matter to them.

All three boards indicated that they have extensive transition programs in place. For example, one of the boards notes that it has implemented several initiatives, including summer programs for students in the primary grades; a welcome kit that is mailed to all on-reserve schools with information on attending publicly funded schools; a video that includes students who have made the transition letting their peers know what to expect; and travel funding for board staff to make presentations to Aboriginal communities.

The Ministry provides annual funding for school board projects. A number of these projects include an emphasis on supporting transition from on-reserve schools. By using the revised board reporting template previously noted, the Ministry expects to obtain evidence-based data on the effectiveness of these initiatives and plans to share the results with all boards to support student transitions.

Ontario is participating in three education partnership initiatives. Each of the three partnerships will include the Ministry, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and one of three major First Nation organizations: the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Grand Council Treaty #3, and the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians/Indigenous Education Coalition. The overall objective of the partnerships is to support First Nation student achievement in both First Nation schools and provincially funded schools through developing partnership arrangements, sharing expertise and services and co-ordinating learning initiatives. In 2013, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Ministry, the AANDC and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. The agreement intends to establish a forum for the three partners to work collaboratively to help prepare the Nishnawbe Aski Nation's students for the transition into the public system and provide the educational opportunities required for them to be successful.