



## **Exploring Culturally Responsive School Governance for Aboriginal Student Success in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- The formation of a shared governance approach is identified as critical to the creation of post-colonial education systems;
- The creation of partnerships allows for a space where Aboriginal and Canadian people can come together based on equality and to work towards the best outcomes for all;
- Factors contributing to success include: culturally congruent curriculum and pedagogical approaches, a representative workforce, integrated services model to provide for student's holistic needs, systematic data collection to plan for success and multiple partnerships with external agencies to leverage resources; and
- Reaffirming culturally relevant spaces to ensure that they receive the same benefit from public education is critical to the success of Aboriginal children.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this research project is intended to advance community-identified educational, organizational, governance needs and achieve the aspirations of the Saskatoon Tribal Council ("STC"). The STC has engaged in policy and research development pertaining to education and governance, while consulting with their membership communities. The purpose of the research is to document the successes and challenges encountered to date as part of the work completed through the *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership.

The goal of this project was to determine a governance framework in relation to the nature of control within First Nations education. This project is aimed at improving the quality of education and retaining a meaningful degree of community control and autonomy over schooling among the STC's schools.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

This project was completed in collaboration through the *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership agreement, which includes the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Division. This partnership was established in 2010 with the aim to foster a closer

relationship between First Nations and Metis people and the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Division schools. The education partnership is a collaborative design whereby First Nation, Inuit and Metis education will be promoted, strengthened and facilitated through the development and implementation of enhanced services, programs and curriculum.

**The Saskatoon Tribal Council and its member First Nations include:**

Kinistin Saulteaux First Nation, Mistawasis First Nation, Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Muskoday First Nation, One Arrow First Nation, Whitecap Dakota First Nation and Yellow Quill First Nation.

**METHODOLOGY**

The three essential purposes to research include, exploration, description and interpretation. The focus of this study will be both descriptive and interpretive in nature by building on current research literature and collecting original data to document the success and challenges that were encountered to date as part of the work of the *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership. The research is guided by following over-arching research question: *How has the Mamawohkamatowin Partnership assisted in the articulation and enactment of mutually desirable, culturally responsive innovations in education governance and administration in Saskatoon?*

To answer this question, this research addresses to adopt a qualitative design. The goal of the research is to explore the depth, richness, and complexity participants assign to the lived experiences of the *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership. Through the qualitative case study provides an opportunity for participants to socially construct knowledge based on their lived experiences while providing the researchers with an opportunity to interact with the participants to gain a better understanding of the socially constructed truth that is dependent on the participant's perspectives.

**MAIN FINDINGS**

The *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership ensures more equitable outcomes from public education First Nation leaders responded to provincial partnership policy by establishing innovative partnerships and governance structures which foster greater Aboriginal parental involvement in, and control over, their children's education.

The primary intent of this relationship is to foster closer relationships between First Nations and Metis people and the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Division as a means of improving educational outcomes. It was agreed that a Partnership Governance Committee would provide direction and guidance on issues of governance, priority setting and monitoring of the activities of the *Mamawohkamatowin* partnership.

The committee partnership would be convened twice a year to ensure that the following principles were being followed. The partnership has agreed to the following commitments:

- To recognize, support and ensure Treaty knowledge is honoured within the educational system to support healthy relations among all students;
- To develop an effective communication strategy;
- To ensure the partnership is based on respect, honesty and understanding;
- To address the issue of equity as it relates to both education and employment aspects; and

To recognize, support and ensure Treaty knowledge is honoured within the educational system to support healthy relations among all students.

The Mamawohkamatowin partnership has resulted in many positive benefits to both parties and First Nations children in schools. The partnership has led to a commitment to co-host the Indigenous Language Festival with the Saskatoon Public School Division. Additional benefits include enhanced communication and data sharing, and the hiring of a representative workforce coordinator to work at increasing representation of First Nations and Metis people. Stakeholders that were interviewed for this research were unanimous that the *Mamawohkamatowin* partnership has resulted in many positive benefits to both parties and children in CSCS and STC schools. The *Mamawohkamatowin* partnership contributed to the development of a three-year First Nations and Metis Education Plan. The partnership has also resulted in Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools and Saskatoon Tribal Council schools working more closely together to share capacity and resources.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to explore the evolution of an educational partnership between a provincial school division and a First Nation Tribal Council. The goal of the research project was to support the efforts of both parties to create culturally responsive innovations in educational governance and administration in Saskatoon. The literature review and the overview of policy considerations highlights the complexities of First Nations education and jurisdictional issues.

Data collected for this research project and the *Mamawohkamatowin* Partnership has evolved over the last decade within a provincial policy context. The collaboration between Aboriginal peoples and provincial schools has contextualized means of achieving more equitable educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Saskatchewan Education Partnerships Policy is a tripartite agreement between Saskatchewan First Nations, and provincial and federal governments. This agreement works to enhance authentic partnerships and collaboration among the provincial educational system and First Nations and Metis people.

Other components of the intended agreement include the following principles:

- Shared problem solving, decision making, resources and accountability;
- Clearly identified mutual expectations and defined roles of partners;
- Practices that reflect and nurture the values of mutual respect and understanding;
- A shared commitment to the well being and educational success of each child and young person within provincial and First Nation schools; and
- A shared vision, goals and objectives, established collaboratively.

This is not an exhaustive list, rather a summary of the policy principles that were to be followed during the tripartite partnership.

**For more information on this project visit:**

**<http://uakn.org/research-project/exploring-culturally-responsive-school-governance/>**

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: [www.uakn.org](http://www.uakn.org)



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