



Addressing Truth and Reconciliation

Summary report of Ontario's colleges

March 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2015 report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) provided the country with a roadmap for establishing a new, mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Despite the history of Canada's residential school system, the report highlighted the important role of education in the reconciliation process and called upon government and educators to reduce longstanding gaps in education and employment outcomes.

Developed in partnership with Indigenous staff and educators, a new survey of Ontario colleges provides a first look at how the sector is responding to the TRC Calls to Action. The results suggest that although colleges are at various stages of addressing the report's recommendations, significant actions are underway across the sector. Highlights from the survey include:

- In addition to all colleges having a dedicated counsellor for Indigenous students, a large majority provide additional student supports including access to Elders, peer tutoring, traditional medicines, sharing circles, and dedicated bursaries.
- Almost all colleges noted recent efforts to provide Indigenous students with a welcoming environment through dedicated Indigenous student centres and space for ceremonial purposes, traditional land acknowledgements, smudging policies, and traditional drumming and dancing at major campus events and celebrations.
- More than two-thirds of the sector reported on initiatives or partnerships to update curriculum with Indigenous knowledge. Colleges are working with Indigenous faculty and knowledge keepers to review curriculum, develop Indigenous learning outcomes, and create new modules, courses, and programs.
- Approximately 60 per cent of colleges are working with their Indigenous communities to develop standalone education strategies or are including Indigenous education within their strategic plans.

The sector recognizes that much of this work is just beginning and it will take years for colleges to adapt academic, student services, and human resource policies through engagement with Indigenous communities and stakeholders. Colleges will look to build on the conversations and lessons learned from the sector's second annual meeting on truth and reconciliation, where Indigenous staff and educators met recently with college vice-presidents to examine such issues as curriculum development, community engagement, human resources, and student persistence.

The sector also acknowledges the contributions of our Indigenous faculty and staff, who have worked tirelessly to champion Indigenous education within their institutions. Thanks to their efforts, thousands of Indigenous students are welcomed and supported on college campuses every year. Their advocacy and leadership will continue to guide colleges in their work towards reconciliation.

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INTRODUCTION

Established in 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was mandated to document the history of Canada's residential school system and to inspire a process of truth and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. After 6 years of meeting with communities and survivors across the country, the Commission's final report revealed the devastating impacts of the residential school system for Indigenous peoples and the ongoing legacy for Canadian society. The report's 94 'Calls to Action' provide the country with a roadmap for establishing a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people built on mutual understanding and respect. They call on governments, public institutions and organizations, the private sector, and all Canadians to engage in the process of truth and reconciliation.

One year after the report was published, the Ontario government issued a formal apology to the survivors of residential schools and released *The Journey Together*, a report which recognized the importance of reconciliation and outlined the government's commitment and investments to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the province. Given the importance of education in the process of reconciliation, the province called on the learning ministries, along with the new Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, to work together to increase post-secondary participation rates for Indigenous learners and to provide all students with more opportunities to learn about Indigenous cultures.

“[T]he Commission believes that education is also the key to reconciliation.”

P. 285, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*

COLLEGES RESPOND TO THE TRC CALLS TO ACTION

Ontario's college sector is committed to working with Indigenous communities and the provincial government to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners and address the TRC Calls to Action. The need is critical given that a large gap still remains in overall educational attainment in the province. Due in part to the legacy of the residential school system and other historical barriers, a 17-percentage point difference in post-secondary attainment still exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people aged 25 – 64.

The Indigenous population is also young, with almost one-third under the age of 15, and is the fastest growing in Canada. Ontario's colleges have experienced this growth first hand. Between

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