



**ONTARIO NATIVE  
EDUCATION COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION**

P.O. Box 220, 38 Reserve Road, Naughton, Ontario, P0M 2M0

Phone: (705) 692-2999

Fax: (705) 692-9988

Email: [oneca@oneca.com](mailto:oneca@oneca.com)

Website: [www.oneca.com](http://www.oneca.com)

---

## **BULLETIN**

**March 14, 2010**

**To: ONECA MEMBERS, STUDENTS, AND FIRST NATIONS**

**Fr: ONTARIO NATIVE EDUCATION COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION**

**Re: Response To: The Macdonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy – Free To Learn**

---

The document Free to Learn is a proposal being put forward by a right wing conservative think tank. This is a proposal based on ideology rather than facts. It is a one size fits all approach which does not consider the economic realities of First Nations people, the critical support mechanism that contribute to First Nation student success, nor do they acknowledge the fundamental success of the Post Secondary Student Support Program.

The paper lacks credibility because it is not based on sound research and it does not have concise data to support it. The MacDonald-Laurier report is attempting to manipulate the general public and First Nations into believing that establishing a Aboriginal Post –Secondary Account for each Aboriginal is a means of committing to Aboriginal education. No where does the proposal give an analysis of the actual cost of post secondary in 18 years from birth. Under this proposal, students would only be able to afford one year of post –secondary.

The report fails to note the fact that the Post Secondary Student Support Program has been highly successful, supporting approximately 23,000 students last year. The potential for greater success exists if the current funding cap is removed. The proposal fails to note the important role fulfilled by our local education counsellors, and student support workers. There is no analysis provided about the issues such as higher success rates in college education versus university education; the gender attainment gap, or the need for equitable resources and service provision for First Nation students through JK to secondary

It remains our view that post secondary education is a constitutional right not a discretionary program. The idea of establishing a Aboriginal Post Secondary Account with a phase in period of 6 years while giving the government the authority to determine what is equitable and basing it on the availability of funds at the time is ridiculous. This approach will put students at the mercy of the government with no real guarantee that the government will be able to honour their commitments.

From our perspective this report is a disguised path of institutional assimilation, and is a diversion from the real problem which is; that there has been a 2% funding cap on post secondary since 1996; the inability of INAC to affectively deliver its own program which has been pointed out by the auditor general on several occasions; and that First Nation education in all areas have not been adequately resourced for many years.

All stages of First Nation education require attention and support. As the fastest growing population in Canada and as confirmed by countless studies, enhancing the investment in First Nation post secondary education is a critical requirement that will have significant dividends to both First Nation and Canadian societies and economies as stated in the *Report of Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (2007)*

I raise these issues because there have been numerous reports floating around that are intended to discredit First Nations, while at the same time giving the impression that the government is increasing additional support for education.

I urge you to share this information with your community members, students, parents and state your objection to this misguided and ill-informed policy proposal.

Respectfully

Cindy Fisher,  
President