

Promoting Careers in the Skilled Trades to Indigenous Youth in Canada



About the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) is a national, not-for-profit organization working with stakeholders in all regions of Canada. We influence pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration. We share insights across trades, across sectors and across the country to promote apprenticeship as an effective model for training and education. Our Board of Directors is comprised of representatives of business, labour, the jurisdictional apprenticeship authorities, education and equity-seeking groups. Through our work, CAF-FCA has shed light on several key issues affecting apprenticeship, such as the perceived barriers to accessing and completing apprenticeship and the business case for apprenticeship training. For more information, visit the CAF-FCA website at www.caf-fca.org.

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Author:

Emily Arrowsmith, Ph.D.
Researcher
CAF-FCA

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum
364-440 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa ON K1R 7X6

Email: info@caf-fca.org

Website: www.caf-fca.org

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1.0 Introduction

This report describes experiential learning opportunities in high school for students interested in learning about the skilled trades. There are three main ways students obtain hands-on learning experiences: trades exploration, trades and technology courses and Youth Apprenticeship Programs. Schools, Indigenous education and training organizations, non-profits, unions, industry associations and colleges offer specific programs for Indigenous youth. Examples of Indigenous-focused initiatives and the impacts on student outcomes are described.

The report also summarizes interview and dialogue findings. CAF-FCA interviewed high school teachers, school board officials and representatives from non-profit organizations, unions, industry associations and Indigenous education and training organizations. These individuals administer career exploration programs or teach trades courses and they provided insights about the barriers Indigenous youth experience when trying to pursue hands-on learning at high school or when transitioning to an apprenticeship after high school. They shared what has successfully worked for them when trying to implement experiential learning programs. They made recommendations based upon their experiences working directly with Indigenous youth.

Indigenous high school and post-secondary students identified barriers and provided recommendations they felt would help Indigenous youth, like themselves, succeed in apprenticeships and skilled trades careers.

2.0 Approach

The report findings were obtained from these sources:

- Fifty-two interviews were conducted from September 2017 to March 2018 with high school teachers, provincial/territorial apprenticeship administrators and representatives from non-profit organizations, industry associations and Indigenous education and training organizations.
- CAF-FCA conducted a consultation with seven Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors. This group is organized and overseen by the Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Management Board. Each member was chosen by their community to advise on youth issues. There are high school, college and university students in the group. The students are from across Ontario.
- Feedback was gathered from 20 Indigenous high school students who attended a career awareness conference for Indigenous youth in March 2018 in Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Eighty-six participants who attended the November 14th, 2018 Supporting Indigenous Student Success in the Skilled Trades event provided their insights during the small group discussion.
- An additional event was held on February 28th, 2019 in Vancouver. Seventy-three participants shared their thoughts during the small group discussion.

CAF-FCA received information from First Nation, Métis and Inuit organizations. Participants were from urban, rural and Northern regions. Some were living within Indigenous communities and others were living outside their communities.

The term “Indigenous” is used throughout the report, except in cases where a specific report, program or data source uses the term “Aboriginal.” The term “community” is used instead of “reserve.”

3.0 Experiential Learning Opportunities at High School

Across Canada, youth receive exposure to the skilled trades through these high school programs:

- Trades Exploration Programs
- Trades and Technology Classes/Co-op/Work Placement
- Youth Apprenticeship Programs.

These programs are open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. There are special initiatives for Indigenous youth.

Figure 1:Experiential Learning Opportunities at High School



3.1 Trades Exploration Programs

3.1.1 Programs

Each provincial and territorial apprenticeship agency supports career exploration activities for youth at elementary and high school. These opportunities are open to all students. They are offered at high schools in partnership with Skills Canada, industry associations, non-profits and colleges. Indigenous education and training organizations also offer programs. Trades exploratory programs include these activities: Try-a-Trade Workshops, camps, conferences, presentations, tours and job fairs.

Skills Canada and its provincial/territorial affiliates offer the following programs:

- Cardboard Boat Races
- Skills Exploration Days (Junior High specific)
- Regional Skills Canada Competitions
- Provincial Skills Canada Competitions
- Girls Exploring Trades and Technologies Conference.



Skills Ontario organizes specific activities for Indigenous youth. It has camps for Indigenous youth in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, incorporating cultural elements into the camp programming. It hosts mentoring events and Trades and Technology Days where youth network with community members who are working in the skilled trades. There are opportunities to do hands-on activities at these events. The staff give presentations about skilled trades careers to Indigenous students with culturally relevant information. For Grade 7 to 12 Indigenous students, Skills Ontario hosts an event at the Skills Ontario Competition. This event helps youth understand the rewarding career options in the skilled trades while celebrating their shared cultural heritage.

Skills Manitoba provides in-school presentations to schools in Northern Manitoba with a large population of Indigenous students. The Skills Manitoba representatives talk to students about skilled trades careers, the importance of employability skills and where students can receive further information. Staff tries to emphasize opportunities that are currently available in the local geographic area. Students are provided a booklet that describes various trades and apprenticeship opportunities. Students participate in hands-on activities where they can use tools. Skills Manitoba offers other activities to engage students. In Grade 6, Skills Manitoba offers the Trades and Technology Olympics where groups of students visit different stations and do hands-on activities. In Grade 7, students build sleds. In Grade 8, industry mentors guide students through activities in trades such as carpentry and welding. These activities are held in communities or students travel to an urban centre. Indigenous mentors are encouraged to participate so students can talk to people who have succeeded in the trades. Skills Saskatchewan also implements activities such as camps and workshops in Northern Saskatchewan where there is a large Indigenous population.

School boards and high schools offer trades exploration opportunities in addition to Skills Canada activities. The Ottawa Catholic District School Board exposes students to birch bark canoe building under the guidance of an Indigenous mentor in the school atrium. Any interested student may participate. Students learn about math, physics, history and geography when helping to construct the canoe.

In Northern Manitoba, the Frontier School Division offers exposure to the trades by bringing mobile training units with tools and simulators to northern communities and by implementing community projects such as building greenhouses.

The Regina District Industry Education Council is a partnership among the Regina Public, Regina Catholic and Prairie Valley School Divisions, the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, community-based organizations, government agencies and employers. The Council coordinates opportunities for students by hosting events such as Try-a-Career Days, Career Spotlights and Middle Level Summer Skills Camps.

Industry associations offer career exploration activities. The Canadian Welding Foundation has Mind over Metal five-day exploratory camps. At the camps, participants learn the importance of safety, teamwork and problem solving. They gain hands-on experience and build something they can take home. On the last day of the camp, students are encouraged to invite their parents, guardians and relatives to enjoy a BBQ. In 2017, summer welding camps were held at Bonar Law Memorial High and at Sugarloaf High, where First Nation middle school students completed a variety of welding projects. In the same year, TransCanada partnered with the Canadian Welding Foundation to fund eight Mind over Metal camps primarily for Indigenous youth in Alberta and Northern British Columbia. These programs targeted students living in First Nation communities. Students traveled to post-secondary institutions and learned about welding and pipeline careers.

The Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council has a Trades Exhibition Hall where youth can access hands-on learning opportunities in interactive booths set-up for 14 trades. Students receive a safety orientation and then journeypersons explain the trade to the students based on examples in the booth. In a safe environment, students have the opportunity to experience climbing into a boiler or building a brick wall. There are three to six hours of interactive learning. The Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, an organization representing First Nations across Nova Scotia, brings Indigenous youth from across the province to participate in a two-day trades fair at the hall.

Colleges also offer programs. In Manitoba, Red River College oversees an annual Indigenous youth summer camp called HAWK (Hands-on Activity Week for Kids). HAWK offers participants a holistic view of self, spirit and education. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies worked with 20 schools in 2017 and 2018 to provide facility tours, opportunities to do hands-on activities and mentorship for Indigenous students.

Unions are also involved in promoting careers in the skilled trades. The Saskatchewan Building Trades organization has an Indigenous Labour Development Strategist who attends career fairs and First Nations communities and talks to Indigenous students about the apprenticeship pathway and industry expectations. Students are provided a realistic view of what it is like to work in the trades. Graduating from high school and obtaining academic upgrading is encouraged. Indigenous success stories are shared to provide role models for the students. Students who are interested can follow up and must meet the requirements of a 10-point checklist so they will be prepared to succeed. Developing a career plan is a part of the process.

Provincial and territorial governments support trades exploration programs for Indigenous youth through the apprenticeship departments or authorities.¹ The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency hosts the Aboriginal Youth Skilled Trades conference. Ninety students have opportunities to network with journeypersons in several trades.

Indigenous education and training organizations create opportunities for Indigenous youth to access career awareness activities, experiential learning opportunities and trades training. A Friendship Centre in the Northwest Territories offers trades exploration programs for Indigenous youth as well as counselling, job coaching and a safe space to hang out.

The Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Management Board in Ontario hosted a Career Conference for Indigenous Youth. High school students learned about the apprenticeship pathway as a potential career option. The Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Management Board also offers hands-on opportunities for youth to learn about the construction trades by building homes for Habitat for Humanity.

The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island has various trades exploration programs. In Grade 7, Indigenous youth learn about team building, life skills and beautifying their communities. In Grade 8, 9 and 10, students have opportunities to try different trades at the local college and then reflect on what trades they liked and did not like. If they identify a trade they like, they receive help picking high school courses that will prepare them for an apprenticeship.

The Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) is an Indigenous organization working with 15 First Nations living within and outside communities across the province of New Brunswick. As a part of their work, they offer career exploration opportunities to youth. At the Indigenous Summer Games, children can try on welding gear and there are try-a-trade activities. There are trades orientation programs where students learn about what it is like to be a utility arborist or a powerline technician. In partnership with industry, JEDI offers access to welding camps in communities. Working with the college, the organization offers opportunities for individuals to try-a-trade. There is an initiative where individuals learn about food preparation, make the food and bring it to elders. There is another program where individuals learn about carpentry and then take orders and sell furniture. JEDI would like to offer a program where students attend a week-long camp where they learn about the trades during the day and at night engage in cultural activities such as learning about the medicine wheel, smudges, sweat lodges and blanket ceremonies.

1. See the provincial and territorial apprenticeship websites for more information about their Indigenous initiatives.

3.1.2 Outcomes

Trades and exploration activities positively influence Indigenous students. After participating, interviewees observed students have an increased desire for information about apprenticeship and an increased interest in taking a trades and technology class.

Skills Manitoba has reached over 6,000 students throughout Manitoba. Since the launch of these in-school presentations in 2007 and 2008, High School Apprenticeship Program participation has increased by 244 per cent. In Northern Manitoba, in-school presentations started in 2013 and 2014 and since that time enrollment in the High School Apprenticeship Program has increased by 39 per cent.²

At the Mind over Metal camps organized by the Canadian Welding Bureau, participants completed questionnaires. Ninety-five per cent of participants indicated they would pursue welding in the future. Participants who attended the camps funded by TransCanada completed pre-and-post questionnaires. After the camp, participants were more likely to consider a career in welding than prior to the camp. They expressed interest in returning to the camp and finding a local high school that offered welding and metal fabrication programs.

As a part of a pilot project in 2016 and 2017, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies offered tours to Grade 7 Indigenous students and completed pre-and-post questionnaires. Prior to the tour, the students were not thinking of pursuing post-secondary education. After the tour, a higher number of students identified post-secondary education as a potential future goal. These positive results encouraged the college to offer more tours to students in 2018.

3.2 Trades and Technology Classes/ Co-ops/Work Placements

3.2.1 Programs

Trades and technology classes are another way students access experiential learning opportunities. Students complete hands-on learning in a shop and may complete co-op or work placements with employers during the school year or the summer. They earn credits towards their high school diploma. According to the 2015 National Apprenticeship Survey, 20 per cent of Indigenous students participate in high school co-op programs. Forty-one per cent participate in trades or technical programs. These participation rates are the same or are similar to non-Indigenous students. Twenty per cent of non-Indigenous students participate in co-op and 38 per cent participate in trades or technical programs.³

High school teachers and school board administrators provided examples of the courses offered at their schools. At Louise Dean High School in Alberta, Indigenous learners develop real-world skills in courses about culinary arts, food preparation, Fine Arts, fashion design, technology studies and cosmetology. Beading activities, sewing moss-bags or ribbon-skirts and cooking traditional Indigenous foods are cultural activities integrated into the courses.

2. It is assumed the comparison period was between 2007 and 2008 to 2017, and 2013 and 2014 to 2017.

3. Based on a special data request from the National Apprenticeship Survey. See: CAF-FCA, *Apprenticeship in Canada*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2018).

The Regina District Industry Education Council offers Career Connections and the Summer Apprenticeship Program. As a part of these programs, Indigenous students receive safety training, hands-on experience with tools and work experience. Credits towards their high school diploma may be provided.

In Manitoba, College Lorette Collegiate implements the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. The staff meet with five or six Indigenous students once a week for two hours up until January and February and then once every two weeks. The staff work with the students on job readiness skills, team building and other skills pertinent to joining the workforce. At the end of the year, the students complete a 35-hour internship with an employer. The students also take part in cultural activities such as going to sweat lodges.

At Frontier School Division in Northern Manitoba, trades classes are offered. Instructors with their Red Seal designation do the training. Teachers use culturally appropriate objects and employ community references the students would understand. They can work on snowmobiles or fix cars developing practical skills. In Grade 11 and 12, students can participate in a program where they build houses helping to address housing shortages within their communities.

At Kugluktuk High School in Nunavut, career and technology courses are offered. Three out of the seven courses are offered in the shop. Students can take courses in electrical, plumbing, carpentry, cabinet making and welding, while also pursuing math and applied physics courses. The goal is for students to become apprentices. Attending class every day is standard behaviour and stronger students in the class will encourage weaker students to attend. Student initiative is encouraged. Students have the option to design their own project, make it, market it and sell it. After they pay for the materials, they can keep any additional money earned. Extracurricular activities include trips to see the trades training facilities at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and Aurora College. The students participate in fundraising activities so they can go on the trips. Students participate in the Nunavut Skills Competition. Prior to leaving high school, students review math, English and science in preparation for the Trades Entrance Exam. This exam is the same one that the Government of Alberta offers and is a requirement before entering an apprenticeship. Students write the exam before leaving high school so they are prepared to take the next step on the apprenticeship pathway.

In the Northwest Territories, École St Patrick High School offers trades courses in construction, welding, hairstyling, mechanics and technology. The school has shop space and instructors with industry experience and their Red Seal designation. The teachers try to replicate a real-world work environment in the shops. They teach the students about employer expectations. Attendance is tracked. Students are encouraged to show up on time and clean up their workstations. Organizing the shop this way helps students adjust when they transition to the workplace after high school. Students are taught they will have to manage a variety of people at work. Students participate in the Skills Northwest Territories competitions.

At Diamond Jenness High School, also in the Northwest Territories, students are paired with companies and spend a semester working with an employer. Exposure to the real-world work environment is key to determining whether students genuinely like the trades.



In addition to the schools, other organizations offer Indigenous youth work placement programs. Careers Next Generation is a non-profit organization based in Alberta that has the Indigenous Career Pathways Program. This program is designed to provide Grade 10, 11 or 12 Indigenous students career exploration opportunities and work experience. In order to participate, students complete an application and must provide a cover letter, resumé, references, marks and their attendance record. Students learn about academic requirements for apprenticeships and how mathematical and scientific concepts are applied in the workplace. Students receive help with their interview skills and job coaching and are also matched with employers to obtain workplace experience.

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies offers a Construction Worker Preparation Course. Grade 10 and 11 students develop hands-on carpentry skills and work on community projects. There are typically 20 students in the class.

Indigenous education and training organizations offer work placement programs as well. Indigenous education and training organizations who are members of the Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle in Ontario offer summer career placements for Indigenous youth aged 15 to 30. These placements may include skilled trades occupations.

The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island also has a summer work placement program. For Grade 11 and 12 students, there is a Targeted Wage Subsidy Summer Program. As a part of the program, students try the electrical, carpentry and welding trades. Students gain hands-on experience by working for an employer during the summer. Employers are provided a wage subsidy. After the placement, there is a de-brief to discuss the experience with the student and the employer. Employers are asked how the students did and the students are encouraged to reflect upon whether they would truly like to pursue the skilled trades as a career.

Indigenous education and training organizations also offer training programs to help youth who have left school. Pewapun Construction in the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation oversees the Youth Build Program in Manitoba. This program provides Indigenous youth aged 16 to 29 who have left school an opportunity to build and renovate homes in their communities. Youth obtain trades training under the supervision of a journeyperson on a worksite, receive upgrading and develop a learning plan. There is follow-up to assess the progress youth are making in achieving their learning plan goals. Youth earn hours towards their Level 1 apprenticeship. Job coaching and mentorships are available after the program is over.

As a part of the federally funded Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program, there are also opportunities for Indigenous youth who may or may not have a high school diploma to access programs with safety training, academic upgrading, financial supports, job coaching and work placements. Indigenous staff and counsellors help guide the participants.

3.2.2 Outcomes

Interviewees reported Indigenous students who have opportunities to participate in trades and technology classes and/or co-ops/work placements have better attendance at school, increased motivation to learn math and improved employability skills. Developing hands-on skills leads to increased confidence and improved opportunities to obtain employment.

At Kugluktuk High School, where the majority of students are Indigenous, offering trades courses and opportunities to learn hands-on in a shop environment leads to improved outcomes. Talking to students about a career pathway beyond high school and why their current learning is important to pursuing that path is crucial to student motivation and retention. The students who took trades courses had higher attendance and employment levels than those in non-trades courses and were motivated to stay in school. Trades students performed better in core subjects as well. Learning about the practical application of math in the shop helped weaker students do better in their math classes. Students achieved better results on their English exams. There was an increase in the male graduation rate at the school which was previously low. In one cohort, 50 students graduated from the high school and half the individuals obtained employment. Six students became apprentices and started working towards their Red Seal designation and six worked as labourers in trades-related jobs. Others gained employment in non-trades related work. These outcomes were a substantial improvement compared to past cohorts.

École St Patrick High School teachers find students in trades courses often experience a turnaround in their academic performance. Being in the shop motivates the students and they want to do better at school. Students earn better grades and their attendance improves. At least one student from every class enters an apprenticeship. Employment after school is facilitated because the shop class replicates the real-world work environment.

At Diamond Jenness High School, there are higher graduation rates when Indigenous youth pursue trades courses. Finding subjects the student is interested in is key to attendance and engagement. When students become interested in the trades and achieve success, they want to work harder at their other courses.

The outcomes information provided by the teachers supports other research findings linking motivation, peer support, relevant learning, extracurricular activities and identifying future goals to high school completion. A literature review of 250 journal articles and reports based on 25 years of research in the United States found there are individual, peer and school related factors that impact high school graduation rates.⁴ Individual factors such as intrinsic motivation, school engagement, expectations of academic attainment and believing one can control one's academic outcomes are linked to high school completion. Positive relationships with peers also play an important role in high school graduation, acting as a protective factor against stress and promoting educational attainment. School-related factors such as positive student-teacher relationships, school-sponsored extracurricular activities, small schools and career and technical education help students understand the relevance of high school to their future plans and life goals and are also linked to high school completion.⁵

4. Pathways to Education, "Factors that Promote High School Graduation," *Research Summary*, January 2017. See the literature review study, J.F. Zaff, A. Donlan, A. Gunning, S.E. Anderson, E. McDermott and M. Sedaca, "Factors that promote high school graduation: A review of the literature," *Educational Psychology Review*, 2016.

5. Ibid.

3.3 Youth Apprenticeship Programs

3.3.1 Programs

The majority of provinces and territories have a high school Youth Apprenticeship Program for students aged 16 years or older. Although provincial or territorial program requirements are unique, in general, credits towards a high school diploma are earned while working for an employer in a skilled trade. Students may graduate high school with Level 1 of their apprenticeship completed. Some jurisdictions offer scholarships for students who graduate from these programs. Fifteen per cent of 2015 National Apprenticeship Survey respondents reported being in a Youth Apprenticeship Program.⁶

It was considered beyond the scope of this report to describe each provincial and territorial Youth Apprenticeship Program. For more information, readers should see the provincial and territorial apprenticeship agency websites.

3.3.2 Outcomes

Interviewees noted Youth Apprenticeship Programs provide students with these benefits:

- connection with an employer willing to sponsor their apprenticeship
- Level 1 of their apprenticeship complete
- development of employability skills such as punctuality and workplace communication.⁷

⁶. The number of Indigenous students participating in Youth Apprenticeship Programs is unknown. A specific data request would have to be made to Statistics Canada in order to find out the percentage.

⁷. CAF-FCA could not find a study that evaluated the outcomes of Indigenous students in Youth Apprenticeship Programs.

4.0 Barriers

4.1 Overview

Interviewees, dialogue participants, Indigenous high school students and the Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors identified barriers preventing Indigenous youth from participating in experiential learning opportunities at high school and transitioning to apprenticeships after high school, including:

- lack of awareness about career awareness opportunities and apprenticeship
- no shop classes or shops are in poor condition
- limited public transportation
- lack of essential and employability skills
- lack of personal supports
- limited connections with employers
- not enough Indigenous journeypersons to mentor youth
- financial barriers
- unwelcoming institutions and workplaces
- administrative barriers.

4.2 Lack of Awareness about Career Awareness Opportunities and Apprenticeship

The Indigenous high school students CAF-FCA talked to said they lacked awareness about trades exploration opportunities and apprenticeship entry. Educators must be informed about apprenticeship in order to provide accurate advice, but dialogue participants pointed out that often guidance counsellors are overwhelmed trying to manage students' social problems and it is hard for them to stay up-to-date. Indigenous education and training association representatives said career awareness is important because they want youth to make informed decisions about the trades based on a realistic understanding of what is involved. Individuals may have to explore a variety of trades prior to choosing the right one for them. Money and time are wasted when individuals enter training and then decide they do not like the trade.

“Knowledge of the apprenticeship system needs to increase. We need to financially support guidance counsellors to access further education about careers in the skilled trades so they can build their knowledge base.”

-Dialogue Participant



4.3 No Shop Classes or Shops are in Poor Condition

Teachers and industry association representatives pointed out that many Indigenous communities do not have high schools with shops so youth cannot take shop classes. Setting up shop space and purchasing the tools and equipment is expensive, especially for schools in remote areas. The Construction Foundation in BC is trying to address this problem by providing First Nation schools with equipment. Some shops are set-up and then left in disrepair. Instructors are prevented from offering courses because they cannot teach if the shop classroom does not adhere to health and safety standards.

At schools with functioning shop classes, Indigenous students said they wanted to take shop classes, but they could not obtain spots because the classes were full. Teachers talked about classes with too many students limiting individual student time on tools and equipment.

4.4 Limited Public Transportation

Indigenous students said without a driver's licence and access to a vehicle, getting to work or a co-op placement is difficult. There is often no plan or process for students to obtain a driver's licence so they could get to work. Public transportation is limited in rural and remote areas where many Indigenous communities are located.

4.5 Lack of Essential and Employability Skills

Teachers, industry association representatives and Indigenous education and training organizations identified a lack of essential skills as a major challenge preventing Indigenous youth from succeeding in high school and pursuing apprenticeships. Students lack reading and numeracy skills. The appropriate level of math for the trades is not taught at high school so youth are often not prepared to succeed in apprenticeship programs. There are discrepancies between grades and actual skill levels. In addition, any learning disabilities need to be identified earlier. Schools need to communicate with First Nations about skill levels so the First Nation staff can intervene earlier and provide the required supports. Employability skills are also important. Many students struggle with time management and punctuality during their work or co-op placements.

4.6 Lack of Personal Supports

Indigenous students said individuals may lack access to affordable housing and day care. For some individuals, addiction impairs them from attending class or work. Teachers noted when students are living in Northern Indigenous communities and they must relocate to a Southern location for high school, being away from their family and friends makes it difficult for them to focus on school.

4.7 Limited Connections with Employers

The Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors pointed out Indigenous youth lack connections with employers and struggle to obtain work experience and employment. The Construction Foundation of BC found youth are unlikely to stay in the trade if they cannot find trades work after three months.⁸ Teachers also observed if students graduate and there are no jobs, they get discouraged and do not transition to apprenticeships, even though they are interested in the trades.

4.8 Not Enough Indigenous Journeypersons to Mentor Youth

Interviewees observed that many youth living in Indigenous communities cannot become registered apprentices because there is no one in the community qualified to train them. Although provincial/territorial rules differ, typically, every apprentice requires a certified journeyperson to supervise them. Many tradespeople living in Indigenous communities do not have their certification.

4.9 Financial Barriers

The Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors pointed out that financial pressures can be more intense for Indigenous youth, many of whom are supporting families with small children. Limited money means students have no way to pay for a car to get to work. Working to earn money can be too stressful, especially if an individual has a full course load. After high school, students may be reluctant to incur debt and there is often a lack of awareness about the financial supports offered. Youth may require help completing the necessary paperwork to receive government grants, the Canada Apprentice Loan or scholarships.

8. Findings from the Construction Foundation of BC Skills Ready project.

4.10 Unwelcoming Institutions and Workplaces

Indigenous high school students feared they would experience racism and sexism at skilled trades workplaces. The Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors said some employers and teachers do not support the integration of cultural components into the workplace or learning environment. The advisors noted it can be intimidating to learn about another culture, but it is important to have cultural humility. There must be respect for the culture and the unique knowledge and cultural traditions Indigenous peoples bring to a work or school environment. Employers need to show how they are changing their workplace culture to nurture and support youth who are learning new skills. The Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors believe part of the problem is that policies and approaches at educational institutions and workplaces may not recognize or may be at odds with Indigenous culture and values. Indigenous youth may perceive that institutions and workplaces are not willing to adapt making it difficult for Indigenous students to feel like they fit in. If administrators and employers truly want to welcome Indigenous peoples, they need to change the way they do things at a fundamental level, from learning assessments to their policy implementation. There should be consequences when bullying and harassment occurs.

For non-Indigenous teachers, dialogue participants felt access to cultural competency training could help them feel more knowledgeable and empowered when interacting with Indigenous students and dealing with issues of cultural sensitivity in the classroom.

“As true allies in helping to overcome the racism and sexism in industry, we must offer continued support to our students. We must make sure they know they are supported. We won’t give up.”

-Dialogue Participant

4.11 Administrative Barriers

Teachers observed that school board administrators need to work with provincial/territorial administrators so the administrative barriers Indigenous high school students or new graduates experience when pursuing apprenticeships may be addressed. The experiential learning of Indigenous students may not be recognized by the provincial/territorial apprenticeship agency and more flexible assessment methods may be helpful. Apprentices must earn and document a certain number of hours towards their apprenticeship. The processes and paperwork related to documenting the hours can be cumbersome for bands to administer. In some cases, by the time the paperwork is in place, the employment has ended and the hours do not count towards the apprenticeship, thus delaying student progress. Apprentices may get designated as “inactive” in the apprenticeship system, even though the individuals are working in the trades.

5.0 Experiential Learning Opportunities at High School: Promising Program Practices

5.1 Overview

Interviewees and dialogue participants shared their promising practices when implementing career awareness and experiential learning opportunities at high school:

- develop partnerships with Indigenous communities
- hire Indigenous liaison staff
- create awareness about trades exploration opportunities and Youth Apprenticeship Programs
- integrate culture into experiential learning opportunities
- assess students and offer upgrading
- hire instructors with trades experience
- connect youth to employers.

5.2 Develop partnerships with Indigenous communities

Interviewees and dialogue participants said having a respectful and responsive approach requires going to the Indigenous community, listening to community members and integrating community member feedback into the training approach. Indigenous communities, school boards, employers and training organizations need to share their training goals and expectations. Interviewee and dialogue participants observed that capacity varies across the country. Some First Nations have partnerships with their school boards and understand the apprenticeship system. Others have limited connections and know very little about the apprenticeship system. The First Nations communities who lack knowledge require information about apprenticeship and insights about how the system works. A community champion is often needed to lead initiatives and maintain momentum around skilled trades-related projects and programs. Dialogue participants advised that administrators and teachers should review The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and implement them when developing partnerships with Indigenous communities.⁹

Interviewees talked about the importance of committing to long-term partnerships. One teacher said he has been working to develop employer and community support for his program for 15 years. Now, he says, employers want to hire the students as apprentices, but it took a long time to build the trust among the groups involved.

⁹. See the The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reports: <http://nctr.ca/reports.php>.

Interviewees talked about the importance of understanding the opportunities available in specific Indigenous communities. Key questions include: What jobs are available? What are the trades in demand? Is there a high school apprenticeship program that students can participate in? Who in the community has their Red Seal and could mentor apprentices? This information helps the partners determine how to advise students when considering what trade to choose. Partners should think about the potential pathway and next steps for the student. Offering career awareness opportunities and training in the steamfitter/pipefitter trade, for example, might not be the best idea if there are no local jobs available and no mentors in the community. Partners need to think about these issues together before creating activities or programs.

5.3 Hire Indigenous Liaison Staff

When feasible, employing an Indigenous liaison staff person or youth worker facilitates positive relationships between the schools and the Indigenous communities and provides an important support for students. Indigenous high school students said they preferred talking to Indigenous youth workers at school because the youth workers understood their cultural background. In British Columbia, the Industry Training Authority noted the importance of having Indigenous teachers and counsellors in high schools.

5.4 Create awareness about trades exploration opportunities and Youth Apprenticeship Programs

Interviewees and dialogue participants noted engaging parents and community members in hands-on activities increases interest in skilled trades careers. In rural and remote Indigenous communities, the Frontier School Division in Manitoba uses mobile training units and community building projects such as building greenhouses as ways to engage entire families in learning about the skilled trades. Grandparents, parents and children all work together building something and learn first-hand about the value of trades work. During these community events, parents gain valuable insights about career planning and can better advise their children. Family support is crucial for individuals who pursue apprenticeships.

When doing outreach in Indigenous communities, the staff, whether they are teachers or individuals working for a non-profit or industry association, should understand the programs available at the local school so that accurate information is provided to parents. Some schools have shop classes, but others do not. Trades camps may be offered in certain places, but not others. Students have to be 16 to enter a Youth Apprenticeship Program and some trades require Grade 11 and 12 math and science. For those youth who are interested in the trades, clear next steps in terms of class or program availability and eligibility need to be identified.

Since economies differ significantly by region, those encouraging Indigenous youth to enter into the skilled trades need to understand the labour market so the trades promoted align with local job availability. Labour market information needs to be shared with Skills Canada officials and their provincial/territorial affiliates so they can tailor their presentations and programming to each Indigenous community they visit.

5.5 Integrate culture into the experiential learning opportunities

Interviewees and dialogue participants said experiential learning opportunities must integrate Indigenous culture in order to successfully engage students and provided specific examples based upon their experiences. Trades-related career exploration activities must be supplemented by Indigenous-led activities such as community lunches, elder visits and counselling sessions. Elder participation fosters community support and encourages youth to take extra pride in their skills development and training.

At Louise Dean High School in Alberta, students are more motivated to learn when they can “see themselves” reflected in what they are learning. Content in core subjects such as English and trades-based subjects includes Indigenous culture. Elders and Indigenous speakers are brought into the school to pass down cultural knowledge, which is connected to specific learning goals in class. Medicine wheel teachings, gathering sage and traditional beading techniques are all taught at the school. The Windsor School Board also provides opportunities for students to learn from cultural teachers and Elders. Skills Canada Saskatchewan integrates cultural components into its competitions in Northern Saskatchewan. Participants create Indigenous art and jewelry utilizing the skills they have been taught by their elders and parents.

Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario hosts teas so Indigenous peoples can share their different knowledge systems and oral traditions with students. A garden was designed and built using sustainable agricultural techniques by community members. Indigenous artists come and show the students other ways of learning and teaching that do not involve lecturing at the front of the class. In British Columbia, the Industry Training Authority noted the importance of experiential learning credits through community, family and land-based cultural learning.

In Saskatchewan, K to 12 curriculum is infused with First Nations and Métis content and Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. Topics covered include residential schools, treaties, Indigenous peoples in Canadian history and contemporary issues. Leaders from First Nations and Métis education organizations contribute to the curriculum.¹⁰

The Government of the Northwest Territories requires that cultural teachings are integrated into every course. A strengths-based approach is used which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for learner success. The Beaufort Delta Education Council in the Northwest Territories noted keeping culture at the forefront keeps the students engaged. Learning must reflect the geographic region and day-to-day life. Integrating Indigenous worldviews ensures the content is relevant for the students.

At Kugluktuk High School in Nunavut, hands-on learning is done first and then the teacher and students discuss theoretical concepts and think about “the why.” Physics is taught using locally-based examples. Projects include building items used in a Northern setting such as sleds, kayaks and igloos.

“Including, valuing, respecting and honouring our diversity is important. Students who feel included and connected to what they are learning and what they know is motivating and is likely to improve achievement and success.”

-High School Teacher Interviewee

10. See: www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/student-first.

The Canadian Welding Bureau offers welding camps to Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth preferred to make moose antlers and circle dream catchers rather than the assigned object. The staff adjusted their approach so the learning would be meaningful to the students. To involve the community, elders, mothers, aunts and other community members were invited to the lunches during the camps.

Representatives from Indigenous education and training organizations felt integrating culture into training was strongly linked to student success both for high school students and those who have left high school. When offering trades-related programs, using Indigenous language and ceremonial calendars, talking about Indigenous history and offering activities such as soapstone carving positively influenced the group dynamic, increased learner self-awareness and built learner confidence. The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island has increased learner engagement in its programming, improved learner attitudes and increased attendance by integrating more cultural components. Participants are taught about the history of the community and are shown artifacts. They learn about elders' teachings and basket making. Participants leave the program with a greater feeling of community pride. The Athabasca Tribal Council in Alberta has found integrating the seven sacred teachings into the learning has helped address behavioural issues. Themes such as respect and how to make responsible choices are covered in these sacred teachings.

“We need to keep our culture in the forefront and keep our students connected to who they are. A best practice is offering engaging learning opportunities that are relevant and part of students’ daily existence. An on-the-land component provides lots of opportunity for learning about mathematics and engineering when students learn how to track and set traps for muskrats or beaver. A better job of integrating both worldviews is needed to enhance student learning experiences.”

-Indigenous Education Organization Interviewee

5.6 Assess students and offer upgrading

Interviewees and dialogue participants said Indigenous youth must be assessed and, if required, offered academic tutoring and upgrading to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each individual allows upgrading to be targeted addressing specific learner needs. Culturally-relevant questions that allow candidates to reflect upon their life experiences can make the assessment process less daunting. Even if students lack work experience, they can identify skill strengths based on projects and activities completed in their community. When developing action plans for students, achievable goals are crucial. Regular attendance and completing assigned tasks instill accountability and keep the learner on track. Rewarding skills achievement celebrates success. Upgrading must be funded on an ongoing basis, even after high school, so the skills development progressively improves.

Teaching employability skills such as the importance of regular attendance, time management, conflict resolution, teamwork and work ethic are important. Employer expectations should be shared with the students so they are prepared for the workplace.

At Louise Dean High School in Alberta, teachers support student success and goal setting through an Individual Program Plan with priority learning goals for each course. Social workers provide students regular counselling support. Graduation coaches help Indigenous students achieve academic success in order to meet graduation requirements.

5.7 Hire instructors with trades experience

Committed and experienced skilled trades instructors are needed to engage the students in learning about the trades. According to the Beaufort Delta Education Council, it is crucial that Northern schools have teachers with a trades background so shop classes may be offered. Ideally, the teacher should be a certified journeyman who has in-depth technical trades knowledge. He or she should be enthusiastic about the trades and a trades champion at the school.

5.8 Connect youth to employers

Interviewees and dialogue participants said developing relationships with local employers is important. The Regina District Industry Education Council in Saskatchewan works with high schools and employers. The Council developed a registry of names so interested youth were connected to local employers interested in training and mentoring students. The Council identifies employer champions who are committed to mentoring Indigenous youth. The Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario connects Indigenous apprentices with employers and unions through local committees. There is also a database for employers to search for candidates. The Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario model is now being replicated in other provinces.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Overview

Indigenous high school students, the Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors and the interview and dialogue participants said supports are needed in these main areas:

- holistic supports
- staff supports
- infrastructure supports
- career awareness supports
- learning supports
- workplace supports
- mentoring supports.

6.2 Holistic Supports

- Provide supports for individuals at every step of the process, including access to social workers, elders and graduation and job coaches who can provide mentorship, counselling, job coaching and one-on-one support
- Create awareness about the financial supports and learning resources and assist with applications
- Provide accessible and affordable housing, transportation and daycare such as pre-paid taxi services and bus passes
- Engage families and communities so they can form a support network for the students
- Reach out to local employers, schools and Indigenous communities so partners are working together
- Provide specialized supports for Indigenous youth who have been in the foster care system

6.3 Staff Supports

- Seek out community support, including elders and community champions to come to the school
- Hire Youth Support Workers or Indigenous Co-ordinators
- Ensure guidance counsellors are knowledgeable about the local labour market, Indigenous culture, the apprenticeship pathway and the Youth Apprenticeship Program
- Offer consistent career counselling services at schools



6.4 Infrastructure Supports

- Have the appropriate shop space at the school
- Obtain updated equipment and tools

6.5 Career Awareness Supports

- Ensure images of Indigenous peoples are profiled in materials
- Create profiles of Indigenous peoples who have been successful in their chosen career path
- Encourage parents to be supportive of children interested in skilled trades careers
- Offer Indigenous youth access to tools that identify their abilities, their strengths, and what they like so they have opportunities to think about their potential career paths prior to choosing their courses in Grade 9 and 10
- Be explicit with Grade 9 and 10 students about the math, science and English skills required in an apprenticeship and ensure these students are directed to the right courses
- Give detailed information about program requirements for specific trades
- Offer opportunities to Indigenous youth to experience a typical day on-the-job with a journey person
- Bring mentors into the classroom to provide youth role models
- Have Indigenous entrepreneurs and business owners talk to students about why they are successful and the importance of respect
- Create more awareness about youth job boards and part-time jobs
- Host job fairs and invite Indigenous youth to participate
- Provide more opportunities to gain work experience through co-op placements
- Implement retention initiatives for Indigenous students so they stay at school
- Offer peer-to-peer supports in-person and online so youth have someone to talk to about their challenges
- Help Indigenous youth build their confidence so they feel capable of pursuing post-secondary education
- Offer targeted programs to help Grade 12 students transition to work

6.6 Learning Supports

- Reach out to provincial/territorial apprenticeship administrators to understand the precise rules and requirements around apprenticeship and ensure the requirements are understood by Indigenous youth and parents
- Work with administrators to remove barriers and develop alternative solutions so student learning and hours worked within communities can be recognized towards a diploma or an apprenticeship
- Help Indigenous youth with the paperwork so it does not deter them from registering or submitting their hours towards their apprenticeship
- Assess high school students midway through high school to evaluate their skill levels and intervene to address gaps
- Provide experiential learning credits through community-based cultural learning
- Offer tutoring on an ongoing basis

6.7 Workplace Supports

- Identify the employers willing to hire Indigenous youth
- Build youth confidence so they can talk to employers about their skills and abilities
- Facilitate employers and Indigenous youth getting to know one another and ensuring job matches are a “good fit”
- Explain to students how to join a union if they would like to pursue that route
- Consider alternate sponsorship arrangements in collaboration with the province or territory so the Indigenous community can sponsor youth
- Engage employers by sharing promising practices of welcoming workplaces so the working environment is safe and the young person’s physical and mental health is safeguarded
- Ensure cultural leaves are provided to Indigenous employees
- Provide certification for companies with cultural competence so Indigenous youth can identify a safe place to work
- Recognize the desire for work/life balance and different cultural values
- Follow through on implementing policies and do not let bullying occur with no consequences
- Target resources to help Indigenous apprentices transition from Level 1 to 2, which is a critical period when many apprentices leave the trades

6.8 Mentoring Supports

- Help Indigenous youth navigate the apprenticeship system and the world of work after high school by connecting them with mentors who are willing to talk to youth and connect them to supports
- Increase the number of Indigenous peoples with certification providing more opportunities for Indigenous youth to receive training and employment within their communities
- Complete research to determine how many certified community members would be interested in returning home to mentor youth
- Encourage community members who have worked for a significant number of years in the trades to write the certification exam and become mentors
- Set high school students up with individuals working on big projects in the Indigenous community so youth can obtain initial work experience, envision their future and possibly obtain employment



7.0 Conclusion

Experiential learning opportunities at high school provide important introductory opportunities to learn about the skilled trades, to use hand tools and equipment, to connect to employers and to gain initial work experience. CAF-FCA consulted with Indigenous high school students, the Circle of Indigenous Youth Advisors, high school teachers and industry, non-profit, union and Indigenous education and training representatives. Interviewees shared information about trades exploration programs, trades and technology classes and Youth Apprenticeship Programs.

Interviewees and dialogue participants shared promising practices for engaging Indigenous youth. Engaging First Nation communities is an important first step for schools. To offer an entire community the opportunity to learn about the skilled trades is invaluable. Communities provide important support networks for youth as they pursue their schooling and apprenticeship training. Individuals require holistic supports such as housing, counselling and money to support them through high school and their apprenticeship.

The engagement process should start early. Accurate information about the courses required to qualify for a Youth Apprenticeship Program and entry into apprenticeship should be communicated to youth, parents and First Nation partners. Employers and Indigenous tradespeople should be brought into the classroom to talk to the students. Employers can outline their requirements so students know what to expect in the workplace and Indigenous tradespeople can act as role models and mentors to the students.

Learning should be relevant to the students. When teaching physics, engineering and math, examples should reflect local conditions. In the North, students will be more engaged with a physics lesson if tracking, hunting and setting-up traps for muskrats and beaver are used to illustrate theoretical concepts.

Indigenous cultures should be integrated into experiential learning programs. Local elders should be invited into the classroom to speak to the students about Indigenous history and culture. Experiential learning opportunities can highlight symbols and activities both common and unique in Indigenous cultures. Examples include building sweat lodges, sleds and kayaks and creating moose antlers and circle dream catchers.

Employability skills such as arriving on-time and good workplace communication skills should be emphasized. Schools, employers and Indigenous communities need to work together so students may access work placement opportunities. Work placements help the students determine whether the trades are a good fit for them and provide initial work experience.

Indigenous youth represent a growing part of the Canadian population and could form an important part of the future skills trades force if they receive adequate training and preparation through high school, apprenticeship and workplace training. Experiential learning opportunities provide early exposure to the skilled trades and provide important opportunities to set future educational and career goals. Meaningful references to Indigenous symbols and culture and including community members, such as elders and Indigenous tradespeople in the teaching and mentoring, further engage Indigenous learners. Programs that integrate hands-on learning with Indigenous culture lead to improved student outcomes such as increased learner engagement, attendance, graduation and employment rates.

