



OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL
MANITOBA

Department of Education and Advanced Learning

**Improving Educational Outcomes
for Kindergarten to Grade 12
Aboriginal Students**

January 2016

WEBSITE VERSION

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January 2016

The Honourable Daryl Reid
Speaker of the House
Room 244, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8

Dear Sir:

It is an honour to present my report titled: *Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Students*, to be laid before Members of the Legislative Assembly in accordance with the provisions of Sections 14(4) and 28 of *The Auditor General Act*.

This report reflects audit work conducted between September 2014 and June 2015. Unless specifically noted in this report, it does not reflect the Department's actions related to Aboriginal education initiatives after our audit period. For example, the report does not consider the January 2016 public disclosure of Aboriginal student achievement data.

Respectfully submitted,

**Original document signed by
Norm Ricard**

Norm Ricard, CPA, CA
Auditor General

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Auditor General's comments

High school graduation is an essential building block in helping people gain employment, earn a higher income, and achieve overall well-being and prosperity. That is why it is particularly concerning that the government's most recent data (using its proxy-calculated graduation rates) shows that, despite the government's efforts to date, only 55% of Aboriginal students are graduating from high school, compared to 96% of non-Aboriginal students; a gap that has widened since 2010. In this audit we assessed how well the Department of Education and Advanced Learning (Department) was managing its goal of narrowing this gap.

Aboriginal students' educational outcomes can be affected by many factors outside the control of Manitoba's provincial school system. For example, students may find it much more difficult to succeed academically if they and their families are facing the housing, health, financial and other challenges associated with poverty. Manitoba's education system must nonetheless strive to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students.

In 2010 the Department released its updated Action Plan to improve education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. The plan was developed with the involvement of 4 partner departments and other stakeholders. One of the Action Plan goals was Aboriginal student engagement and high school completion.

We found that the Department needed to provide more leadership in guiding and coordinating the efforts of its partner departments and the school divisions in achieving Action Plan goals. And it needed to more systematically identify the key barriers to Aboriginal student success and the initiatives to overcome the barriers. Future Department plans could then focus on overcoming the most significant barriers faced by Aboriginal students. For example, while transitioning from on-reserve schools to provincial schools presents many challenges for First Nations students, there are few provincial supports aimed at overcoming this barrier.

In addition, the Department needs to know what is working well to affect a desired change. To know this, it needs more quantifiable output and outcome measures for its various initiatives, and better data analysis to identify and explain trends and why the gap persists. This information is also needed to provide the public with more meaningful information on results achieved.

The Department has made some progress in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the provincial curriculum, especially regarding the social studies curriculum, but it is still struggling to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba.

The Department can do more to ensure its initiatives and related funding levels help Aboriginal students succeed in school and graduate with their peers. Enhanced performance planning and monitoring will help ensure that, over time, progress toward desired outcomes is achieved. To this end, I am pleased that the Department has accepted our 19 recommendations.



I would like to thank the dedicated staff at the Department of Education and Advanced Learning and others we met with during our audit, including school division staff and members of Aboriginal education organizations, for their cooperation and assistance.

**Original document signed by
Norm Ricard**

Norm Ricard, CPA, CA
Auditor General

Main points

What we examined

Aboriginal students' educational outcomes can be affected by factors outside the control of Manitoba's provincial school system. For example, students may find it much more difficult to succeed academically if they and their families are facing the housing, health, financial, and other challenges associated with poverty. Manitoba's education system must nonetheless strive to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students.

The Department of Education and Advanced Learning (the Department) is responsible for ensuring all children in Manitoba have access to an appropriate, relevant, and high quality Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education. We examined whether the Department effectively:

- planned, monitored, and reported on its K-12 Aboriginal education initiatives and efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- supported the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in school divisions and schools with targeted funding, assistance to help smooth student transitions from on-reserve to provincial schools, and teacher resources and training.

Why it matters

There continues to be a large gap between the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students. In Manitoba, one of the most significant gaps is in high school graduation rates. This is especially concerning because Manitoba has a relatively large Aboriginal population, which is significantly younger and growing much more rapidly than its non-Aboriginal population. It is further concerning because the Department's data indicates that the gap is widening. Research literature shows that high school graduation is an essential building block in helping people gain employment, earn a higher income, and achieve overall well-being and prosperity. Higher graduation rates also benefit society as a whole as they help reduce future labour market shortages and social services expenditures.

What we found

The Department's planning, monitoring, and reporting processes are not adequately supporting its efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students

Strategic plan developed, but implementation planning weak

The Department had a broad multi-department strategic plan, the *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan* (the Action Plan), addressing K-12 education, post-secondary education, and employment for Aboriginal peoples. But the implementation planning for the Action Plan's goal of improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students was weak.

Neither the Department nor the Action Plan committees provided sufficient leadership to effectively guide the partner departments towards achieving the Plan's goal of improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. Roles and responsibilities for achieving

results were not well defined. And while the Department provided guidance to school divisions on some individual Aboriginal education initiatives, it gave them no direction on their role in achieving the Action Plan's objectives and intended outcomes. In addition, other government departments had broad, multi-department plans with goals similar to those set out in the Action Plan. Yet there was no strong mechanism to ensure that these various overlapping plans were being coordinated to ensure a unified approach and avoid duplication of planning efforts.

The Department had a list of partner-department initiatives for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, which served as its implementation plan. But the list did not demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of all key government department and school division initiatives already underway and there was no systematic approach to identifying key barriers to Aboriginal student success or the initiatives needed to adequately address them. This hindered effective planning.

The Department also did not develop any specific and measurable short- or long-term targets for improving outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. These would have provided useful checkpoints for periodically assessing progress.

There was no designated budget for implementing the Action Plan. Further, there was no process to ensure funding for related initiatives was aligned with the stated goal, objectives, and intended outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. Most of the funding for Action Plan initiatives directly targeting Aboriginal students was through 2 major grants to school divisions: Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) grants and Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) grants. The combined 2015/16 funding level for the 2 grants was about \$290 per self-identified Aboriginal student (although it was not allocated on a per-student basis). In contrast, British Columbia provided targeted per-pupil funding of \$1,195 per Aboriginal student in 2015/16 and Alberta provided \$1,142.

Gaps and limitations in monitoring, analyzing, and reporting performance

The Department monitored the progress of partner-department initiatives, typically by using anecdotal information rather than quantified performance indicators. And the Department conducted few evidence-based evaluations of key programs and projects. The results of such evaluations would provide valuable information for planning and funding decisions.

The Department tracked and monitored high school graduation rates and various grade-level assessment results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, it did not sufficiently disaggregate or analyze this information to better understand trends, or to discern why the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student graduation rates had widened from 34.8% in 2010 to 41.7% in 2014. The Department also did not track other important performance indicators for Aboriginal students, such as student attendance statistics and results from student surveys designed to assess how safe, respected, and supported students feel at school.

Planning to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and then tracking progress requires a way to identify Aboriginal students. The Department developed processes and tools to help school divisions encourage families to voluntarily declare their children's Aboriginal identity. Although the percentage of students with a self-reported Aboriginal identity increased from 14% in 2004 to 19% in 2014, staff in 3 of the 4 school divisions we visited said they thought

there was still considerable under-reporting. Parents may not be declaring the Aboriginal identity of their children for various reasons. Historical issues, including the legacy of residential schools, affect parents' perceptions and trust of the education system. In addition, 3 of the 4 school divisions we visited were not giving families an annual opportunity to declare.

The Department has not publicly reported any Aboriginal student achievement data related to the stated intended outcomes in its Action Plan. Department officials viewed this information as sensitive. However, several other provinces publicly report Aboriginal student graduation rates and other Aboriginal student achievement data.

There are gaps in the Department's support for the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in school divisions

Funding decisions do not adequately consider where funds are most needed

The Department's processes for allocating AAA and BSSAP funding to school divisions do not consider measured outcomes for Aboriginal students. AAA funding is mostly allocated using Statistics Canada data on the number of Aboriginal families with children in each division; BSSAP funding allocations are based on divisional proposals submitted to the Department in 2004. To better ensure funds are allocated to where they are most needed, allocation processes should consider both measured outcomes and estimates of the Aboriginal student population.

Funding disbursed even if conditions not met; reporting on results being achieved mostly anecdotal

The Department requires school divisions to submit acceptable plans to obtain their AAA and BSSAP funds. However, the Department allocated 33% of its 2014/15 AAA funding to 6 divisions with plans that it considered non-compliant with stated requirements. Department staff said they intended to work with divisions over the next year to help them meet these requirements.

The reports the Department received from grant recipients had mostly anecdotal information on the results being achieved. To help improve this, the Department recently implemented changes that directed AAA grant recipients to report measured outcomes using Aboriginal student specific data. The Department was working on a resource document to assist divisions in planning and reporting on outcomes and planned to deliver regional sessions on using the document.

Student transitions from on-reserve to provincial schools pose challenges, but Department provides limited guidance and minimal targeted funding

First Nations students transferring from on-reserve schools to provincial schools may need supports when transitioning to their new environment. The Department has developed a transition guidance document for school divisions and provides a small number of schools with grants to support student transitions. At one time the Department planned to issue 2 additional guides: one detailing best practices for achieving successful transitions and another that would help school divisions and First Nations develop education agreements to support First Nations students transitioning from on-reserve schools to provincial schools. However, these were never issued.

Infusion of Aboriginal perspectives in curricula and teacher training is ongoing; progress in increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers has been slow

The Department has made substantial progress in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curricula; less for other subject curricula. It has also integrated Aboriginal perspectives into teacher training by requiring all university faculties of education in Manitoba to provide a mandatory 3-credit-hour course focusing on Aboriginal perspectives. And it offers a variety of post-certification workshops and learning forums related to Aboriginal education. However, less progress has been made in increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba. While a Department survey found that the percentage of teachers in provincial schools self-reporting an Aboriginal identity increased from 6% in 2006 to 9% in 2013, the gap between this percentage and the percentage of students self-reporting an Aboriginal identity widened slightly during this time. Department officials told us they were working on a new strategy for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the province.

Summary response of officials

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning (Department) supports and accepts all of the recommendations contained in the Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) report. The Department has already begun a number of initiatives that, when completed, will respond to a significant number of these recommendations. Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning appreciates the attention the Office of the Auditor General is bringing to the Department's efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and we look forward to continuing our work to ensure that Aboriginal students, along with all students in Manitoba schools, receive a quality education.

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning values the perspective provided by First Nations, Métis and Inuit partner organizations, Elders, various Royal Commissions and research studies, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action on the steps that need to be taken to ensure the best education for Aboriginal students. These voices have emphasized that improving education is the best way to address the marginalization attributed to the impacts of colonialism, racism, and residential schools, alleviate poor economic and living conditions, and enhance the prospects of Aboriginal peoples. The Department has already taken steps, and will continue to do so, to ensure that students in Manitoba schools learn about our shared histories and help move society forward towards reconciliation. Disparity in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students remains one of the province's and country's greatest challenges. In Manitoba, Aboriginal education has been and continues to be both a Departmental and provincial priority.

The recommendations contained in this report provide helpful advice and build on the Department's current work and relationships to guide on-going efforts to develop a public education system that increases student success, post-secondary participation and educational attainment for Aboriginal students.

The Department has provided a response to each of the recommendations in the OAG report and the following is a summary of those responses, as they were presented in the OAG report.

Response to Recommendations

On Planning

The Government of Manitoba has publically committed to doing more for Aboriginal children and youth, particularly in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action. On June 21, 2015, government announced a new-four point plan for First Nations, Métis and Inuit education focused on increasing the academic achievement of Aboriginal students. This plan included:

- development of a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework, which will ensure all Manitoba students learn about the histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles and traditional knowledge of Aboriginal peoples, the legacy of residential schools and the significance of treaties
- introducing legislation to enshrine the policy Framework and include a requirement for it to be reviewed and renewed every three years

- updating provincial curricula to reflect Aboriginal histories and perspectives
- working with post-secondary institutions to develop a strategy for introducing more Aboriginal content into Bachelor of Education courses to support teachers to help students meet learning outcomes.

Moving forward, *The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will incorporate the Department's previous *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan: Bridging Two Worlds* and outline key initiatives to be taken that are intended to ensure all students and teachers learn about Aboriginal histories and increase Aboriginal student success, post-secondary participation and educational attainment. In collaboration with educational partners, First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and Elders, an initial draft of the education policy *Framework* has been developed. Once completed and implemented, it will introduce a more refined, integrated approach to planning, assessing and publicly reporting on the impact of the Department's efforts on Aboriginal education. The Framework will take effect at the start of the 2016-17 school year. It is intended to be a living document and includes a requirement that it be reviewed and renewed every three years. First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners are assured a significant role in that renewal process.

One of the key strategic priorities of Manitoba's recently announced *Post-Secondary Education Strategy: A Partnership for Excellence and Student Success* is improving education outcomes for Indigenous students. A new Manitoba Coalition for Indigenous Education will be formed to advance the goal of raising Indigenous post-secondary participation and attainment rates to the provincial average. The Coalition will provide a single and coherent focus to the work of the Department, including building on effective early years, middle years and high school programming that contributes to Indigenous students' postsecondary success.

Prior to the beginning of the audit, the Department revised the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant to include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, which forms the foundation for student academic success. As part of this ongoing reorientation, the Department has continued to work with educational partners to develop a school division planning and reporting process that requires school divisions to identify key indicators of Aboriginal students' success, including methods for reporting on those indicators. School divisions are required to identify and utilize relevant data, to track student achievement on meeting stated outcomes, and to share this data with the Department. This data, along with other sources of information, will enable the school divisions and the Department to better understand the contexts, programming and resources that contribute to student academic success. It will also help to better inform policy, programming and funding directions.

On Monitoring and Public Reporting

The ability to collect reliable First Nation, Métis and Inuit self-declaration data is essential in helping to guide effective initiatives for Aboriginal students. The Department has been working with school divisions to provide parents and guardians of Aboriginal students with opportunities to declare their children's Aboriginal identities. The increased focus on the use of data in educational planning and decision making and closing student achievement gaps has resulted in the Department developing additional ways to calculate graduation rates. This student-tracked rate allows us to examine graduation rates for sub-populations of students, including those who self-declare as Aboriginal. Beginning in 2013, data became available that allowed for the calculation

of a student-tracked graduation rate. This Aboriginal identity information helps to guide planning and programming that is based on evidence of successes and challenges.

In collaboration with The Council of Ministers of Education Canada, the Department has been working to develop and adopt a harmonized approach to self-identification of Aboriginal students and the reporting of graduation rates of all students that is comprehensive and comparative. This harmonized self-identification approach has been shared with school divisions. Moving forward, the Department will continue to work with school divisions to ensure that Aboriginal families understand the reasons for collecting this identity declaration information and that parents and guardians have an annual opportunity to declare their children's identities.

The Department will analyze school division Aboriginal student achievement data with a view towards identifying divisions with (evidence of) higher rates of student success and engage in discussions with those divisions to determine the reasons for those potentially promising educational practices.

On Supporting School Division Delivery of Aboriginal Education Initiatives

Healthy families and living conditions, stable housing and secure employment all help to contribute to successful education outcomes. It has been well-documented that Aboriginal families and communities have been significantly harmed by the impact of colonialism policies, in particular residential schools. In response to these impacts, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning continues to work collaboratively with other government Departments to help support families and communities in enhancing educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Targeted funding and programming supports an extensive range of in-school, after-school and evening learning activities. The Department is also working with schools and various community partners to find ways of offering summer learning programs, including those with a literacy and numeracy emphasis and a parent component. Such programs help to prevent learning loss and provide parents with the knowledge and skills to better support child wellbeing, school readiness, attendance, student success, and school transitions.

The Department commits to undertaking a review of the funding it provides that is specific to Aboriginal students to ensure the terms of reference and reporting requirements are in line with identified priorities, and review whether the manner in which other grants provided to divisions to improve Aboriginal academic achievement are appropriately dispersed.

The Department acknowledges that First Nations students transferring from their home communities to the public school system may require more supports to help them better adjust culturally, socially and academically to a new learning environment and ensure they feel respected, safe and engaged. In 2016-2017 the Department will introduce a new First Nations Transition Fund to support students and schools with the transition process.

The Department continues to provide significant in-service teacher professional development opportunities focusing on Indigenous history and perspectives and is collaborating with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada in the planning of a joint professional development initiative in First Nations schools focusing on literacy and numeracy.

Aboriginal languages are a significant feature of learning opportunities and experiences that help to engage, honor and respect Aboriginal students. Consequently, in September 2015, in recognition of the prominent relationship between language and culture in nurturing emotional, physical and spiritual student wellbeing, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, post-secondary institutions and school boards established the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy to "protect and promote" Aboriginal languages.

Conclusion

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning acknowledges its responsibility to continue to work collaboratively with educational and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit partners to enhance learning opportunities and experiences that engage, challenge and respect Aboriginal students. It also acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that all Manitoba students and teachers learn about the histories, cultures, contemporary lifestyles, traditional values and traditional knowledge of Aboriginal peoples.

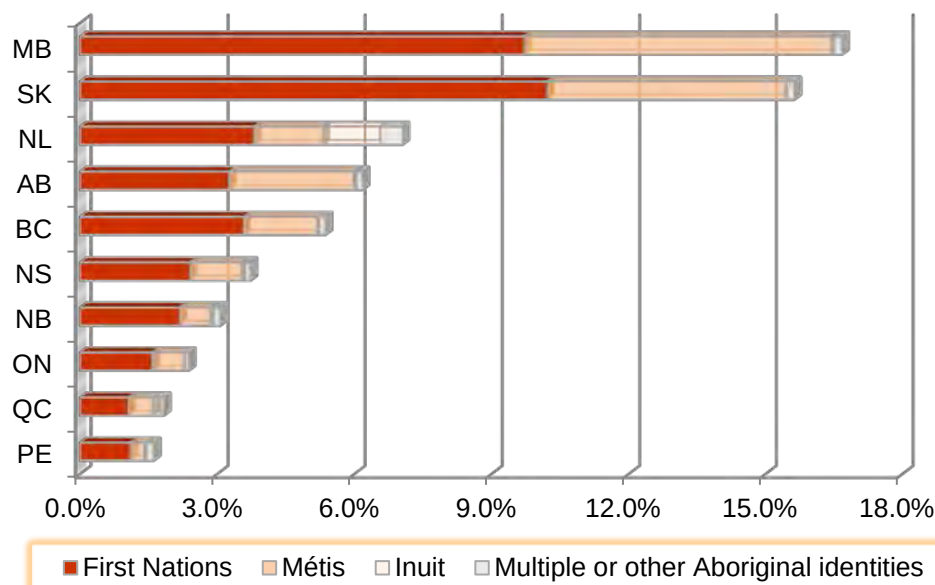
The recommendations contained in this report will build on the Department's current work and relationships to guide its on-going efforts to develop a public education system that increases student success, post-secondary participation and educational attainment for Aboriginal students.

Background

Manitoba's Aboriginal population

The latest Statistics Canada data available at the time of our audit (which was for 2011) showed 195,895 Manitobans reporting an Aboriginal identity. This reflected 17% of the total population and consisted of 3 distinct groups: First Nations (10%), Métis (7%), and Inuit (less than 1%). As **Figure 1** shows, Manitoba has the highest percentage of people with an Aboriginal identity amongst the provinces. In addition, Manitoba's Aboriginal population is young and growing; children under 15 were 32% of the reported Aboriginal population.

Figure 1: Manitoba has the highest percentage of people with an Aboriginal identity amongst the provinces



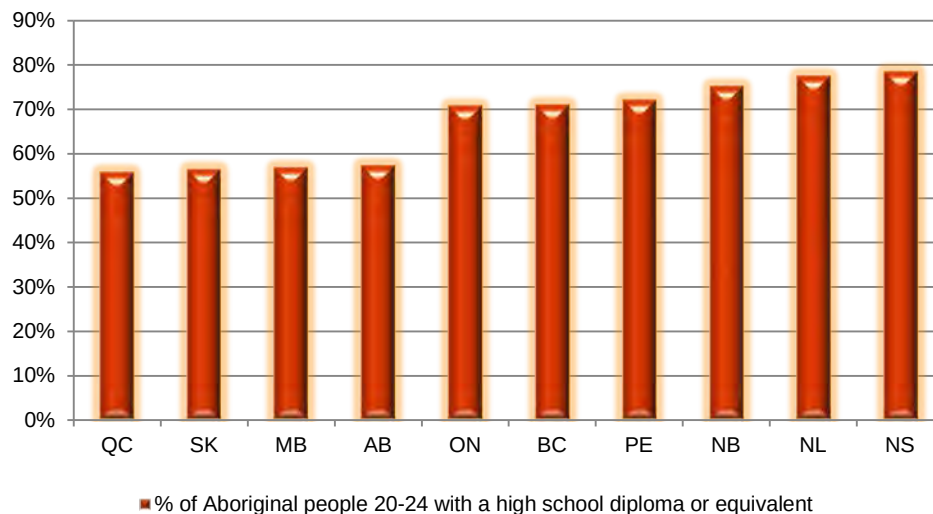
Source: Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey data

Departmental data showed there were 34,228 students in Manitoba's public school system with a self-reported Aboriginal identity in the 2014/15 school year. This reflected 19% of all students (10% First Nations, 7% Métis, 0.1% Inuit, and 2% uncertain).

High school graduation rates

The 2011 Statistics Canada figures for Manitoba showed that 57% of Aboriginal people (41% of First Nations people; 80% of Métis people) ages 20-24 had completed high school compared to 89% of non-Aboriginal people—a gap of 32%. As **Figure 2** shows, the percentage of Aboriginal people in Manitoba completing high school was one of the lowest amongst provinces, similar to that found in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec. And Manitoba had the lowest high school graduation rate amongst the provinces for First Nations people.

Figure 2: Manitoba has one of the lowest percentages of Aboriginal people ages 20-24 that have completed high school



Source: Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey data

Departmental role and responsibilities

One of the fundamental responsibilities of the Department of Education and Advanced Learning (the Department) is to provide direction and allocate resources in support of Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education in Manitoba's public and funded independent schools. More specifically, the Department is responsible for:

- overseeing the regulatory structure governing the K-12 education system (through *The Public Schools Act*, *The Education Administration Act*, and related regulations).
- setting K-12 priorities and policy direction.
- developing K-12 curriculum.
- supporting and facilitating quality teaching and learning.
- implementing and sharing research-informed effective practices.
- allocating K-12 education funding to school divisions.

The Department's School Programs Division and the Bureau de L'Éducation Française are responsible for developing the K-12 curriculum. This includes incorporating Aboriginal history and perspectives into the curriculum, as well as providing related Aboriginal education teaching resources. In addition, the School Programs Division has consultants who work with school divisions and schools on Aboriginal education initiatives. It also collects and monitors student achievement data, including data for Aboriginal students, and is responsible for developing the Department's student achievement data strategy.

Aboriginal Education Directorate role and responsibilities

The Department's Aboriginal Education Directorate (the Directorate) is responsible for leading and coordinating the Department's Aboriginal education and training initiatives (both K-12 and post-secondary). The Directorate is not attached to any particular division within the Department and its director reports directly to the Department's Deputy Minister.

The Directorate's stated mandate is to ensure that Manitoba's education and training systems are responsive to Aboriginal peoples. To this end, it works with school divisions, First Nations communities, Aboriginal and community organizations, and other provincial government departments. It also works with the Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister, who is the Minister responsible for Aboriginal Education.

The Directorate has about 8 staff who work with Manitoba's school divisions, public schools, and First Nations schools through its partnership with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (a federally-funded organization that provides First Nations schools with school-division and department-type supports). Two advisory councils with representatives from the Aboriginal community help guide the Directorate's work, one for its K-12 initiatives and one for its post-secondary initiatives.

Provincial funding for Aboriginal students and Aboriginal education initiatives

The Department provides over \$1 billion in provincial operating funding to school divisions for K-12 schools. As almost 20% of the student population self-identifies as Aboriginal, a significant portion of this funding is for educating Aboriginal students.

The Department provides targeted funding for Aboriginal students. It provides all of Manitoba's 36 school divisions with Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) grants to improve the academic achievement of Aboriginal students. And it provides 18 school divisions (50% of the divisions) with Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) grants to increase the involvement of Aboriginal parents in education. In 2014/15, AAA grants totaled \$8.1 million and BSSAP grants totaled \$600,000. In addition to these 2 larger grants, the Department provides various smaller-scale grants to selected school divisions. These smaller grants total about \$400,000 annually.

The Department also provides targeted funding to schools to help them support disadvantaged students, which benefits some Aboriginal students. The Community Schools Program helps schools in low socio-economic communities enhance educational outcomes for students through annual grants totalling \$2.1 million. Department officials estimate that close to 50% of the students in these schools are Aboriginal students.

First Nations and federal government roles and responsibilities

First Nations communities on reserves govern their own education and are responsible for providing education programs for students residing on reserves, either by delivering the programs in band-operated schools, or by arranging for provincial school divisions to deliver them. The federal government is responsible for providing education funding to First Nations band councils for these students. Of note, stakeholder studies show that the federal government's funding for on-reserve education is typically less per student than provincial funding for public education. In

2014/15, there were 63 First Nations schools in Manitoba. Ten were managed by provincial school divisions under agreements between the First Nation and the school division.

The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), established by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, is funded by the federal government and provides school-division and department-type support to First Nations schools. These include education, administration, technology, language, and culture services.

Some First Nations reserves only have primary schools. To attend high school, students on these reserves must transfer to the provincial school system. If students continue to live on reserve while attending provincial schools, their education is funded by First Nations band councils (or directly by the federal government) through tuition agreements with the applicable school divisions. However, if students and their families choose to move off reserve, the students' education becomes a provincial funding responsibility.

Commitments to closing the gap

For many years, the Manitoba government has publicly committed to closing the gap in high school graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people:

- In 2004, through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), provincial and territorial ministers of education—including Manitoba—jointly declared Aboriginal education to be a priority issue deserving targeted activity.
- In November 2005, Canadian first ministers—including Manitoba's Premier—and national Aboriginal leaders publicly set a target to close the high school graduation gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2016. That same year, Manitoba's Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet committed to addressing the gap in well-being between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Manitoba.
- In 2008, under CMEC's Learn Canada 2020 framework, education ministers across Canada again jointly declared the objective of eliminating the gap in academic achievement and graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- In 2009, the Federal Government, the Province, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Southern Chiefs Organization, and Manitoba Keewatinowî Okimakanak (the organization that represents northern First Nations in the province) signed an Education Partnership Letter of Understanding. The letter was focused on improving educational outcomes for First Nations students in Manitoba.
- Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy, led by the Department of Family Services, set 7 priority areas for 2012-2016, including closing the gap for Aboriginal Manitobans.
- Manitoba's 2015 budget speech noted the Province's commitment to increasing Aboriginal student graduation rates and supporting the educational aspirations of First Nations students.

Audit approach

We examined whether the Department effectively:

- planned, monitored, and reported on its Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) Aboriginal education initiatives and efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- supported the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in school divisions and schools with targeted funding, assistance to help smooth student transitions from on-reserve schools to provincial schools, and teacher resources and training.

We conducted most of the audit between September 2014 and June 2015. We primarily examined processes in place between September 2013 and June 2015. Our audit was performed in accordance with the value-for-money auditing standards established by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada and, accordingly, included such tests and other procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

The audit included review and analysis of Department policies and practices, data, records, reports, minutes, correspondence, and files, as well as publicly available information on Aboriginal education initiatives and reporting in other provinces. We interviewed staff from the Department, various Aboriginal education stakeholder organizations, and 4 school divisions (2 in Winnipeg, 1 rural, and 1 northern). Together these divisions represented 36 % of the self-identified Aboriginal student population, and received 41% of the AAA funding and 59% of the BSSAP funding in 2014/15.

Our audit focused on the Department's processes for K-12 public schools. We did not examine processes related to First Nations schools on reserves, as these are not under provincial jurisdiction.

Findings and recommendations

1. Planning, monitoring, and reporting processes inadequately support improvement efforts

1.1 Planning processes need strengthening

1.1.1 Strategic plan in place and being updated

The Department had publicly issued 2 consecutive multi-department strategic plans related to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. These were broad in scope, encompassing post-secondary education and employment for Aboriginal people, in addition to K-12 education. The first, *Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2004-2007*, was publicly released in 2004. The second, *Bridging Two Worlds: Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan 2008-2011* (the Action Plan), updated the first plan and was released in 2010.

Representatives from the 4 partner departments (then known as Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth; Advanced Education and Literacy; Competitiveness, Training and Trade; and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs) consulted with various stakeholders in developing the Action Plan. Stakeholders included education organizations, post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal organizations, school divisions, the Directorate's 2 advisory councils, and industry councils and organizations.

The Action Plan had 4 stated goals for Aboriginal Manitobans:

- student engagement and high school completion.
- access to and success in adult learning, including post-secondary education and training.
- meaningful participation in the labour market.
- family and community engagement and educational stewardship.

The goal most focused on improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students was the first, “student engagement and high school completion”. The intended long-term outcomes for this goal were to increase:

- student achievement in early and middle years.
- student retention rates.
- student acquisition of credits towards high school graduation.
- the high school graduation rate.

The Action Plan also had 5 objectives related to its “student engagement and high school completion” goal. These were essentially broad strategies and principles for goal achievement. They were to:

- work with Aboriginal organizations, schools and school divisions to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into curricula and professional learning, thereby ensuring a positive, relevant, and meaningful school experience for all students.
- work in partnership with First Nations schools to support student success.

- promote awareness of pathways and transitions to post-high-school career and learning options, with a focus on middle years to Grade 12.
- promote parent and community involvement by developing and implementing useful and informative initiatives and support materials for Aboriginal parents and community members.
- improve the ability to report on success in K-12 learning by developing indicators, assessments, and evaluation processes respectful of the learning of Aboriginal people.

In June of 2015, Manitoba issued an additional 4-point plan for Indigenous education based on recommendations from the recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. The plan stated that the Province would:

- release a new *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* document.
- introduce legislation to enshrine the new policy framework, including a requirement for it to be reviewed and renewed every 3 years.
- update the current provincial curriculum to better reflect Indigenous history and perspectives.
- work with post-secondary institutions to develop a strategy for introducing more Indigenous content into bachelor of education courses to both support teachers and help students.

At the same time, the Department publicly issued a draft *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* document. It included the goals, intended long-term outcomes, and objectives stated in the 2008-2011 Action Plan, as well as guiding principles.

At the time of our audit, the Department was in the process of renewing and updating the Action Plan. To this end, it was again consulting with stakeholders to obtain feedback on proposed strategies. Department officials said they did not anticipate any significant changes to the previous plan.

1.1.2 Better-integrated provincial planning needed

The Province has other multi-department plans and individual initiatives with a significant focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal people, including education and employment outcomes. Yet there is no strong mechanism to ensure that these various overlapping plans and initiatives are being coordinated to ensure a unified approach and avoid duplication of planning efforts.

In 2006, the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs issued *Closing the Gap: A Manitoba Strategy to Improve Aboriginal Well-Being*. The strategy made education a priority area and noted the connection between its goals and those of the 2004-2007 *Aboriginal Education Action Plan*. As previously noted, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is an Action Plan partner department.

In 2009, the Department of Family Services and Housing launched *ALL Aboard: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy*. One of its 4 pillars was "education, jobs, and income support". The 2012-2016 *ALL Aboard Strategy* established 7 priority areas for action, including "closing the gap for Aboriginal Manitobans". The Department of Family Services is not an Action Plan partner; however, the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning sits on the ALL Aboard Committee, which meets 4 times a year.

In June of 2015, the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy issued a report on *The Educational Outcomes of Children in Care*, commissioned by Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors and the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. The report found that children in care have fewer

successes in school than children who have not been in care. Since approximately 90% of the children in care are Aboriginal, the report is strongly linked to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. Health, Healthy Living and Seniors is not an Action Plan partner department; however, Department of Education and Advanced Learning officials sat on the report's advisory group. The Department of Family Services, which is responsible for children in care, was also represented on this advisory group.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Department adopt a unified and coordinated approach to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, ensuring that it engages all key partners and prevents any unnecessary duplication of effort across the Province's different plans and initiatives.

Response of officials: Aboriginal education has been and continues to be a Departmental priority, having been identified as one of the five priorities in the Department Plan. The Department has committed to adopting a unified, coordinated approach that will be embodied in *The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. This *Framework* will incorporate the Department's previous *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan: Bridging Two Worlds* and outline key initiatives that are intended to ensure all students and teachers learn about Aboriginal histories and increase Aboriginal student success, post-secondary participation and educational attainment. The Government of Manitoba has also introduced legislation to enshrine the requirement for this *Framework*, along with a requirement to renew it every three years to ensure that it remains current and relevant.

Additionally, a new Manitoba Coalition for Indigenous Education consisting of Aboriginal partners, post-secondary institutions, education, business, labor and community leaders, will be formed to advance the goal of raising Indigenous post-secondary participation and attainment rates to the provincial average. The Coalition will encompass efforts currently underway at all levels – from early childhood to adult education – to address barriers to educational success.

1.1.3 Roles and responsibilities not well defined

The Directorate is responsible for leading and coordinating implementation of the Action Plan's 4 goals, supported by both a steering committee and a management committee. The steering committee is a working group, comprised of representatives from the partner departments. At the time of our audit, these were Education and Advanced Learning, Jobs and the Economy, Children and Youth Opportunities, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, and Multiculturalism and Literacy. The management committee oversees the steering committee, and is comprised of higher-level officials from the same partner departments.

In practice, the Directorate took more of an administrative role than a leadership role with respect to the Action Plan. Neither it, the Department, nor the Action Plan management committee assumed responsibility for achieving the Action Plan's goal of improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students. Directorate staff noted that all steering committee members were jointly responsible for informing the committee of all relevant departmental initiatives and related progress. The Directorate's role was primarily to collect and document this information.

Neither the steering committee nor the management committee had detailed terms of reference. And, while closing the gap in K-12 educational outcomes is effectively a large and complex inter-

departmental project, worthy of its own individual plan, there was no project charter, sponsor, or manager, either for this goal or for the overall Action Plan.

We expected the Department to provide direction to school divisions and schools on their role in implementing the Action Plan. We visited 4 school divisions and found that senior personnel at each were aware of the Action Plan. Staff in 2 divisions indicated that many of their activities aligned with the goals and initiatives in the Action Plan and, in some cases, this work was underway before the Action Plan's release. However, none of the divisions had received direction from the Department on their role in accomplishing the Action Plan's objectives, although the Department provided guidance to school divisions on some of the individual Aboriginal education initiatives it was funding.

Directorate staff told us that the draft *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework* (released in June 2015 and described in **section 1.1.1**) was intended to help school divisions take a proactive approach to Aboriginal education and develop key areas to focus on. But we found that it did not provide specific direction to school divisions on how to accomplish this. In contrast, the Aboriginal education plans publicly released in both Saskatchewan and Ontario listed specific activities for Ministries, school divisions, and schools.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Department provide leadership and develop mechanisms to ensure a greater focus on planning and implementing initiatives to improve educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, and that it clearly define and communicate responsibilities and accountabilities for achieving results to all parties, including the Directorate and school divisions.

Response of officials: The Department will continue to provide leadership and strengthen its approach to planning and implementing initiatives that improve Aboriginal student achievement. *The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will include new expectations and responsibilities for the Department regarding planning, assessing and publically reporting on Aboriginal education. This includes developing and establishing detailed terms of reference and, in consultation with school divisions, setting clear divisional roles and responsibilities for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

1.1.4 Implementation plan did not reflect all key initiatives already underway

For each of the 5 objectives associated with the “student engagement and high school completion” goal in the Action Plan, the steering committee developed a list that briefly described the related initiatives or activities that each partner department was already delivering or involved with. It then added new initiatives as they were started either by the partner departments, by entities connected to the partner departments (such as universities), or by other entities in collaboration with partner departments (such as the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba). We noted that the Action Plan committees did not create or recommend new initiatives to deal with objectives. The steering committee also deleted initiatives from the list as they were completed.

At any given time, there were about 20 individual initiatives associated with the “student engagement and high school completion” goal, most administered by or connected to Education and Advanced Learning. As examples, these included:

- the AAA and BSSAP grant funding (previously described in the Background section of this report and further described in **section 2.1**).
- funding to programs not specifically directed to Aboriginal education, but indirectly supporting it (such as the Community Schools Program, which supports schools in low socio-economic areas to improve students' success and strengthen communities).
- initiatives to further develop curricula and teaching resources.
- teacher professional learning initiatives.

The 20 initiatives were part of a larger inventory of about 80-90 initiatives for all 4 Action Plan goals. This inventory listing was effectively the steering committee's only detailed plan for accomplishing its broadly-stated goals and objectives and ultimately achieving the Action Plan's intended outcomes.

The initiatives list for the "student engagement and high school completion" goal was incomplete. It excluded several projects to support First Nations students transitioning from First Nations schools to public schools, including one (Restoring the Sacred) funded by Family Services, which was not a steering committee member. The Premier's First Nations Education Initiative to consult with First Nations students on barriers and strategies to support student success was also missing. Directorate staff said partner departments were responsible for identifying related initiatives.

Some K-12 initiatives were not specifically for Aboriginal students, but could significantly impact them. The Department did not consistently include all of these on the list. For example, the Department's School Attendance Initiative was not on the list, although research literature has identified school absenteeism as a barrier to improving Aboriginal student outcomes. But its Student Success Initiative (part of the educational component of ALL Aboard and designed to help students stay in school until graduation) was on the list.

Some school divisions had their own Aboriginal education policies or annual reports (beyond their AAA plans and reports), but they did not share these with the Department as there was no requirement to do so. The Department's plans for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students would be improved if it was more aware of what is already being done in school divisions and schools.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the Department ensure that its implementation plan for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students is based on a comprehensive understanding of the related key initiatives already underway in government departments and school divisions, both to avoid possible duplication of effort and to identify gaps where additional supports are needed.

Response of officials: The Department meets regularly with a variety of partners such as Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and the two Aboriginal Education Directorates' Advisory Councils (which provides to the Deputy Minister an annual report with recommendations to support K-12 and post-secondary success) to share and discuss the range of programs and initiatives in the province that are necessary for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students as well as to identify gaps where additional supports may be needed.

To further support these efforts, the Department will develop new resources that identify and

summarize key programs, actions, and initiatives, delivered by the Department, government, school divisions, Aboriginal organizations and community partners that impact K-12 Aboriginal students. Once developed, these resources will be used to inform Department planning and implementation. They will also be communicated to school divisions and other partners through correspondence, provincial gatherings, and workshops thereby decreasing the likelihood of duplication of efforts and increasing the opportunity for education partners and divisions to learn from existing promising practices and programs.

1.1.5 No systematic approach for identifying key barriers and needed initiatives

Various Canadian studies have noted barriers to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. In no particular order, these include:

- curriculum inadequately reflects Aboriginal perspectives.
- lack of resources to support Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum.
- lack of supports for Aboriginal students transitioning from on-reserve schools to provincial schools and between school divisions.
- teachers and students lack appropriate cultural awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal history, or knowingly or unknowingly engage in racism.
- lack of collaboration and engagement with Aboriginal parents and communities.
- Aboriginal students insufficiently engaged (not attending school or not engaged when attending school); unaware of available future paths; feel uncomfortable or unsafe at school.
- too few Aboriginal teachers.
- lack of knowledge as to what works best.
- lack of funding.

Department staff told us they were aware of barriers to Aboriginal students' success. The Action Plan and its associated list of partner-department initiatives reflected, to varying degrees, efforts to remedy many, but not all, of the barriers listed above. However, when deciding the types and levels of initiatives needed to help Manitoba's Aboriginal students succeed, the steering committee did not systematically consider and analyze current key barriers to success and then assess whether they were being adequately addressed.

In addition, plans to achieve some objectives were underdeveloped or small in scope, rather than systemic approaches. Few were focused on improving achievement in early and middle years—even though improvement in this area was one of the intended outcomes stated in the Action Plan. And there were few planned activities to achieve the stated objective of developing indicators and evaluation processes for reporting on progress.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Department identify the key barriers to success faced by Aboriginal students in Manitoba, assess whether each of these barriers and the Department's objectives and intended outcomes for Aboriginal students are being sufficiently addressed by current initiatives, and take steps to remedy gaps.

Response of officials: The Department has been using a variety of sources of information and research studies to identify barriers to Aboriginal students' success. It has been an active supporter of research, including Making Education Work a five year, \$6 million research project jointly funded at \$3 million each by the Province of Manitoba and the Canada Millennium Scholarship

Foundation. The project was intended to evaluate whether the provision of additional in-school supports and services would assist Grade 10 to 12 Aboriginal students in staying in school, meeting graduation requirements and entering a post-secondary program.

Most recently, the Department has been studying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and Call to Action to further our understanding of the key barriers to success faced by Aboriginal students in Manitoba and how they can be addressed.

In addition, the Department has been taking a close look at what the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative has been doing, which has resulted in noteworthy Aboriginal student academic success and we are also examining the Vancouver School Board's system of tracking Indigenous student achievement.

The Department further supports various research forums such as Shawane Dagosiwin Aboriginal Education Research Forum that provide opportunities for a shared understanding of research pertaining to the interests of Aboriginal peoples and communities. The Department sits at various provincial and national working tables to help to identify effective programming to address barriers to student learning and success.

Going forward, as part of *The Manitoba First Nations, Métis, Inuit Education Policy Framework*, the Department will use provincial assessment data to complement other sources of research and information to identify barriers and work further with our partners to develop potential solutions.

1.1.6 No specific short-term or long-term targets set

The steering committee did not develop any specific and measurable short- or long-term targets for the Action Plan's intended long-term outcomes. These were to increase:

- student achievement in early and middle years.
- student retention rates.
- student acquisition of credits towards high school graduation.
- the high school graduation rate.

For example, the Department or the steering committee could have decided by what percentage over the next 3-5 years it aimed to increase Aboriginal students' Grade 3 and 7/8 assessment results, Grade 9 retention rates and credit acquisition results, and Grade 12 graduation results.

Setting short-term targets is helpful because it provides timeframes and checkpoints for periodically assessing progress to make sure a long-term plan is headed in the right direction.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the Department set specific and measurable short- and long-term targets for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: In fall 2014, the Department reorganized staff and resources to create the Student Achievement Support Unit to work directly with school divisions to develop divisional plans that address academic achievement for all students. Building on this, the Department will work with its partners to identify realistic and meaningful short and long term targets for requesting improved educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

1.1.7 No process to determine funding required to successfully execute Action Plan

There was no designated budget for implementing the Action Plan. Further, there was no process to determine and periodically adjust funding for initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students to ensure this funding was aligned with the Department's related goal, objectives, and intended outcomes. As described in **section 1.2.3**, little progress has been made to date in meeting intended outcomes, which may indicate a lack of alignment.

Most of the funding for Action Plan initiatives directly targeting Aboriginal students was through 2 major grants to school divisions: Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) grants and Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) grants. From 2005/06 to 2007/08, the total AAA funding level was \$6.5 million; from 2008/09 to 2011/12, it was \$7 million; from 2012/13 to 2014/15, it was \$8.1 million; and in 2015/16 it rose to \$9.3 million. The total BSSAP funding level was \$400,000 from 2004/05 to 2006/07, and then rose to \$600,000 in 2007/08, where it has remained.

The Department adjusts the total funding for these grants periodically, but does not consider if the funding is aligned with its goal and intended outcomes. Nor does it align changes to funding with changes in the Aboriginal student population. Therefore, the effective per-pupil funding will decrease if the Aboriginal student population grows at a greater rate than the funding.

Using the Department's data on the number of self-identified Aboriginal students, we calculated that the total 2015/16 funding allocation for these 2 grants was approximately \$290 per self-identified Aboriginal student. Although publicly available comparative information on other Canadian jurisdictions is limited, there were 2 provinces that provided significantly more Aboriginal education funding to school divisions on a per-pupil basis than Manitoba. For the 2015/16 school year, British Columbia was providing targeted grant funding of \$1,195 per Aboriginal student; Alberta \$1,142.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Department align the total funding for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students with the Department's stated goals, objectives, intended outcomes, and targets for these students.

Response of officials: As part of the Funding of Schools package for the 2014/15 school year, the Department changed the terms and reporting requirements for the Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) Grant, directing that at least 50% of the funding be targeted to improving literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students. The remainder of the funding can be allocated toward culturally appropriate learning that otherwise supports the educational and academic success of Aboriginal students. The Department commits to undertaking a similar review of the Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) Grant to ensure its terms of reference and reporting requirements are in line with identified priorities.

1.2 Gaps in monitoring, analyzing, and reporting performance

1.2.1 Inconsistent and weak monitoring of initiatives

Each of the 2 Action Plan committees met periodically to monitor and report on implementation

of Action Plan initiatives. The steering committee discussed and updated the inventory of initiatives, and then reported to the management committee. The management committee reviewed the steering committee's reports and made certain decisions with respect to the Action Plan, such as the consultations to be held when updating it. It also periodically reported to the Aboriginal Issues Committee of Cabinet. However, there were gaps in this process, as described below.

The steering committee was supposed to report on progress twice per year. However, it completed an update on Action Plan initiatives and progress only once in each of 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2012/13, and issued no subsequent updates.

The initiatives list, which was used to document and report progress, showed at least one proposed performance indicator for each initiative. However, these were typically focused on outputs (for example, the number of project participants), as opposed to outcomes (for example, changes in participant school attendance rates). In addition, departments seldom reported on results using these proposed indicators. Instead, they typically provided only a brief high-level description of related activities, using mostly anecdotal information. Directorate staff said the leads for each initiative were responsible for proposing appropriate indicators and tracking results.

The Action Plan committees did not use their monitoring of progress and performance to modify Action Plan implementation efforts going forward. Greater attention to the results being achieved (both by individual initiatives and through the cumulative effect of all initiatives) would help the steering committee and partner departments focus their implementation efforts, assess the resources required, and make useful recommendations on how to prioritize current and proposed new initiatives.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that the Department monitor and report on the results of key initiatives related to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students using quantified output and outcome measures (whenever possible), and that it regularly review and update its implementation plans to reflect what is found to be effective.

Response of officials: The Department provides leadership, direction and support to school divisions regarding reporting requirements and outcome measures. The Department will continue to work with school divisions to develop new reporting processes to improve transparency and accountability, at the same time as developing realistic and measurable targets. Regular reviews and updates about effective programs and initiatives will be part of the renewal and evaluation process that is embedded in the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*.

The Department is also committed to working with school divisions and Aboriginal educational partners to utilize various planning and reporting processes to monitor and assess the impact of key initiatives on outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students and use this and other sources of information (quantitative and qualitative) to inform policy, programming and funding directions.

1.2.2 Few evidence-based program evaluations to inform decision-making

The Department has not conducted evidence-based evaluations of all key programs and projects designed to improve educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students to inform planning and funding decisions.

The Province, in partnership with the federal government, funded a 5-year research project, *Making Education Work*, which provided additional student supports in 3 First Nations high schools and 3 provincial high schools. Although a 2013 project outcomes report showed improved outcomes for participating students, at the time of our audit the Department was only applying the learnings at one high-needs school in northern Manitoba, rather than on a systemic basis. Department officials told us there was a lack of resources to duplicate this project province-wide. Other smaller pilot projects did not have similarly strong evidence-based evaluations incorporated into their design.

While the Department had reviewed AAA and BSSAP grant processes and results, these reviews were not formal evidence-based evaluations. In 2009, the Directorate completed an AAA grant review, which involved discussions with parents and school division personnel, and made several recommendations. And in 2012, following their annual review of school divisions' BSSAP reports, which provided mostly anecdotal information, Directorate staff again made several recommendations. Although Department staff said they had implemented some of these recommendations, there were no specific plans to address all identified concerns from these reviews.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that the Department conduct more evidence-based evaluations of the programs and projects designed to improve educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, and use the results to inform planning and funding decisions.

Response of officials: As a member of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Manitoba plays a key role in strengthening the capacity for evidence-based decision making through actions that include: (a) establishing an approach to encourage Aboriginal students to self-identify (based on successful work previously undertaken by the Department), (b) coordinating common data and indicator definitions, and (c) initiating comparable data-collection procedures.

A number of funding agreements with school divisions currently include a divisional requirement to evaluate the impact of programs on Aboriginal students and these will be strengthened.

The Department has already started to improve monitoring and assessment and evaluation processes to ensure the educational outcomes continue to inform planning, implementation and action including funding decisions. Furthermore, in response to the recommendation, the Department will work with its partners to conduct more evidence-based evaluations of programs and projects designed to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

1.2.3 Limited analysis to explain trends and understand why gap is widening

We expected the Department to track, monitor, and analyze overall progress towards the Action Plan's intended outcomes, both to discern trends and to identify areas where better support for Aboriginal students might be needed. We found that it tracks and monitors high school graduation rates and various grade-level assessment results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, it does not sufficiently disaggregate or analyze this information to better understand trends and discern why the gap between the two is widening. It also does not regularly measure or monitor student retention rates, acquisition of high school credits, or student engagement—

although improvements to each of these is an intended outcome of the Action Plan. Only the high school graduation rates are shared with the Directorate and the Action Plan committees.

Measuring and analyzing high school graduation rates

There are different methods that can be used to calculate graduation rates; provinces do not all use a consistent method. Since 2010, the Department has been collecting data enabling it to calculate proxy graduation rates for both self-identified Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students. The proxy rate is calculated by dividing the total number of high school graduates by the total Grade 9 enrolment four years prior.

Figure 3 shows that the proxy-calculated graduation rate for Aboriginal students increased slightly between 2010 and 2014 (from 53.4% to 54.5%), but that the gap between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students grew from 34.8% to 41.7%—an increase of 20%. The Department had not further analyzed this increase.

Figure 3: Gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal proxy-calculated graduation rates is increasing

Graduation year	Self-identified Aboriginal student graduation rate	Non-Aboriginal student graduation rate	Gap
2010	53.4%	88.2%	34.8%
2011	51.7%	90.5%	38.8%
2012	49.4%	92.6%	43.2%
2013	53.1%	94.4%	41.3%
2014	54.5%	96.2%	41.7%

Source: Department of Education and Advanced Learning

Since 2013, the Department has also been able to calculate a 4-year student-tracked high school graduation rate. Department officials said this calculation method is preferable because it is more accurate and consistent with the method proposed through a CMEC initiative to make high school graduation rates comparable across provinces and territories. The new method allows the Department to measure graduation rates for students graduating on time, as well as students graduating after 5 or 6 years, instead of the standard 4 years.

Figure 4 shows that the student-tracked Aboriginal graduation rate for 2013 improved from 46.9% for “on-time” graduation to 52.8% for “extended-time graduation”. Using the 2013 student-tracked data for extended-time graduation, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was 34.7%, versus the larger gap of 41.3 % when using proxy-calculated data. However, the student-tracked graduation data still shows that the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is increasing. Although both calculation methods show a slight improvement in the Aboriginal student graduation rate, the non-Aboriginal student graduation rate is increasing faster.

Figure 4: Student-tracked graduation rate for Aboriginal students increases with extended time

Graduation year	4-year "on-time" graduation rate			5-year "extended-time" graduation rate		
	Self-identified Aboriginal student graduation rate	Non-Aboriginal student graduation rate	Gap	Self-identified Aboriginal student graduation rate	Non-Aboriginal student graduation rate	Gap
2013	46.9%	83.5%	36.6%	52.8%	87.5%	34.7%
2014	47.3%	84.7%	37.5%	Data not yet available		

Source: Department of Education and Advanced Learning

Measuring and tracking academic outcomes in early and middle years

Graduation rates are an important high-level indicator for monitoring progress toward the Department's overall goal of student engagement and high school completion; however, tracking academic outcomes in early and middle years is also important as it can help identify the educational needs of students sooner to better inform and direct interventions and support. All school divisions complete assessments of select competencies in reading and numeracy at Grades 3 or 4, and reading, writing, and student engagement at Grades 7 or 8. And in Grade 12, standardized province-wide mathematics and English language arts assessments are conducted. The Department collects this data and periodically reviews and compares results for self-identified Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

We reviewed the Department's 2013/14 provincial assessment data. As **Figure 5** shows, gaps between the outcomes for self-identified Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students ranged from 13% to 18%, depending on the subject area and grade level. We also compared the 2013/14 results to those from 2009/10 and found that outcomes and gaps for Aboriginal students had not improved. The Department did not share this data with the Action Plan committees.

Figure 5: Gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes occur in a variety of grades and subject areas

2013/14 Provincial assessment measure*	Self-identified Aboriginal students	Non-Aboriginal students	Gap
Grade 3 Numeracy – meeting or approaching expectations	75%	89%	14%
Grade 3 Reading – meeting or approaching expectations	70%	88%	18%
Middle Years Numeracy – meeting or approaching expectations	69%	87%	18%
Middle Years Literacy – meeting or approaching expectations	73%	89%	16%
Grade 12 Essential Math – passing standardized test	54%	70%	16%
Grade 12 English Language Arts – passing standardized test	73%	86%	13%

Source: Department of Education and Advanced Learning

* Excludes Français and French Immersion program results

Tracking students' credit attainment can also be helpful in assessing progress. In 2008/09, the Department prepared a one-time internal report on Grade 9 student credit attainment in English Language Arts and Math in public schools. The report showed gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the number of core credits attained and in the percentage of students

leaving school before the end of the school year. In the report, the Department committed to monitoring credit attainment annually, but it has not done so.

Further analyzing and disaggregating data for greater insight

The Department has not further analyzed its student achievement data by disaggregating it by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student identifiers. This would recognize that each group may have different educational outcomes and therefore need different supports. These factors could then be taken into account when designing culturally appropriate learning opportunities and student supports. CMEC's *Key Policy Issues in Aboriginal Education: An Evidence-Based Approach* noted the need to individually track First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student achievement data.

The Department tracks student achievement results by school division. We reviewed this data and found that achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and trends over time varied considerably by school division. The Department could further analyze this data in combination with school division characteristics, such as socio-economic indicators. This would help to identify divisions (and schools) doing better than expected given these characteristics and the underlying successful practices. It would also help to identify divisions (and schools) doing less well that may require additional support.

Other important performance indicators

While progress can be measured by tracking educational outcomes, other types of performance indicators would be beneficial as well. For example, it would be useful to measure and monitor student attendance statistics, as well as student satisfaction surveys designed to assess how safe, respected, and supported students feel at school. It would also be useful to measure school environment indicators, such as the number of Aboriginal teachers, school administrators, and other non-teaching staff, plus the knowledge and attitudes of division staff regarding Aboriginal education. The Department had province-wide information on the number of self-identified Aboriginal teachers (described in **section 2.3.3**), but not these other potentially useful indicators. Some school divisions used a survey tool provided by the Department to gather information on students' perceptions on bullying and school safety, but they were not required to disaggregate this data for Aboriginal students or report it to the Department.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that the Department regularly monitor performance data showing the level of progress being made towards all of its publicly stated intended outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, and that it share this data with those accountable for achieving results.

Response of officials: The Department will track and monitor performance indicators specified in the *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* to assess the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students.

The Department will also prepare and publicly release (annual) key indicators of student achievement including reporting on Aboriginal achievement.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that the Department disaggregate and analyze Aboriginal student achievement data by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student identifiers to better understand trends and to develop appropriate student supports.

Response of officials: Moving forward, the Department will disaggregate and analyze Aboriginal student performance data by First Nation, Métis and Inuit student identifiers to better comprehend issues, trends and patterns and where necessary to develop appropriate student supports for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

Recommendation 11: We recommend that the Department analyze Aboriginal student achievement data by school division in order to identify those with better results and the underlying successful practices that could be applied more broadly across all divisions.

Response of officials: The Department will analyze school division Aboriginal student achievement data with a view towards identifying divisions with (evidence of) higher rates of student success and engage in discussions with those divisions to determine the reasons for those potentially promising educational practices. This will build on the Department's commitment to develop and share resources that outline existing programs and initiatives that have shown success.

1.2.4 Little public reporting on progress

The Department has not publicly reported its progress toward the goals, objectives, and intended outcomes stated in its 2008-2011 Action Plan. It publicly released highlights reports related to its 2004-2007 Action Plan in 2006 and 2007, but these had only high-level descriptions of activities undertaken and did not disclose any measured results for Aboriginal students.

The Department publicly reports province-wide student achievement data (including graduation rates and the results of various grade-level assessments) annually and periodically summarizes this data in its report, *A Profile of Student Learning and Performance in Manitoba*. However, it does not separately report Aboriginal student outcomes. It considers this information very sensitive. It has publicly disclosed the percentage of the total student population self-identifying as Aboriginal between 2004/05 and 2014/15.

Three other provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) publicly report high school graduation rates for Aboriginal students. And Ontario has publicly committed to begin reporting this information in 2016/17. In addition, 3 provinces and 1 territory publicly report provincial grade-level assessment results for Aboriginal students, as well as results from Aboriginal student and parent surveys.

British Columbia's annual report titled *How Are We Doing?* has the most comprehensive public reporting. The report provides demographic and student outcome data for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, including:

- provincial assessment results in reading, writing, and numeracy for Grades 4 and 7.
- examination results for courses in Grades 10, 11, and 12.
- high school graduation rates by various rates of completion (6, 7, and 8 years to complete high school from Grade 8).

- education experiences of children in care, including the graduation rate.
- student satisfaction survey results on how safe, respected, and supported students feel in school in Grades 4, 7, 10, and 12.

Publicly reporting plans for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students without disclosing the related progress being made decreases transparency and accountability. However, any public reporting should be accompanied by appropriate context to be sure it does not imply any failure by Aboriginal students and focuses on how to improve the educational system to meet students' needs.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that the Department publicly report annual measured results showing its progress in achieving its stated goals and intended outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: *The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will include a 3-year reporting cycle on the progress of its activities and intended outcomes. The Department will track and monitor performance indicators specified in the *Framework* to assess the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students.

The Department will also prepare and publicly report (on an annual basis) key indicators of student achievement including reporting on Aboriginal student achievement.

1.3 Identifying Aboriginal students is an ongoing challenge

1.3.1 Self-identification process and related communication tools in place

Planning to improve the educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students and tracking related progress requires identifying Aboriginal students. The Department, school divisions, and schools can then conduct analyses to inform strategic decision-making, support evidence-based program development, and better meet students' identified needs. The Department introduced a standard process for obtaining self-declared Aboriginal identity data in 1999. The process gives students' parents or guardians an opportunity to voluntarily declare their children's Aboriginal identity.

The Department encourages school divisions to collect Aboriginal identity information, but it is not mandatory. To promote and improve identity declaration practices, the Department met with school divisions, education stakeholders, and parents in 2006, and again with divisions in 2008. Department officials said there were no plans to conduct another promotional campaign as all divisions are now collecting and reporting Aboriginal identity data.

The Department has also developed a standard form for school divisions to use in collecting Aboriginal identity data, which is available on its website. The form explains that Aboriginal identity data "helps to support the efforts of Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning and school divisions to plan and improve programs in a way that is responsive to Aboriginal learners." In addition, the Department has a related guide on its website that provides more information for parents and guardians.

The Department's data showed that the percentage of students who declared an Aboriginal identity increased 40% between 2004 and 2014, from 13.7% to 19.2%. In 2014, the percentage in

individual school divisions ranged from as low as 1.7% to as high as 57.9%. As this data relies on voluntary self-identification, it needs to be used with caution. Increased percentages may reflect a growing Aboriginal population, as well as a greater percentage of Aboriginal students willing to declare an Aboriginal identity.

1.3.2 Barriers to increasing self-identification remain

Although the percentage of students who declared an Aboriginal identity is increasing (as **section 1.3.1** shows), there potentially remains a significant gap between the actual Aboriginal student population and those that have self-identified. In 3 of the 4 school divisions we visited, staff told us they thought the actual percentage of Aboriginal students was higher than the self-identified percentage. One division's administration estimated that nearly all of the students in the division were of Aboriginal descent; however, only 40.6% of the students had self-identified in 2014/15, a decrease from 45.7% in 2010/11.

Staff in all 4 school divisions we visited noted that 2 barriers to self-identification were poor communication to families as to why the information was needed and families' concerns about how the information would be used. In addition, some officials noted that historical issues, including the legacy of residential schools, affected parents' perceptions and trust of the education system. Parents may also fear that self-identification could affect how their children are perceived or streamed by school staff. As a result, families' decisions with respect to identifying their children as Aboriginal can be complex and sensitive. Building trust with Aboriginal families and communities is an on-going process that will take time. The Department, school divisions, and schools all share responsibility for improving communication and working toward improved relations and partnerships with Aboriginal communities to build this trust. The Department's Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) initiative (further discussed in **section 2.1**) is designed to promote partnerships between Aboriginal parents and schools.

Officials from 2 of the 4 school divisions we visited said they were working to improve school processes for collecting identity data. One was working on a pamphlet and video to instill pride in declaring. The other was working on distributing declaration forms more frequently.

While the Department provides parents with some information about the purpose of collecting Aboriginal identity data, it has not clearly demonstrated how it is using the data collected, or how the data has or could be used to benefit students. Publicly reporting on the progress being made in improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students and disclosing the outcomes gathered through Aboriginal identifiers, as recommended in **section 1.2.4**, would be a useful start in providing parents with some indication of how the data is being used.

The Department expects school divisions to give parents the opportunity to declare their children's Aboriginal identity at least annually, typically during registration. Department officials said they encourage divisions to incorporate the related questionnaire into their annual registration forms. Although declarations do not expire once made, this allows parents who have not used earlier opportunities to declare another chance to do so.

We found that only 1 of the 4 school divisions we visited had a process for giving parents the opportunity to declare annually. In 2 divisions, parents were only given the opportunity to declare their children's identity when first registering them with the division, typically when the children

were entering kindergarten. And in 1 division parents were only asked to declare when registering their children at a new school, typically upon entry to elementary, middle, and high school. This minimized the number of opportunities to declare.

In 2010, at superintendents' request, the Department drafted a manual to guide school administrators in implementing Aboriginal identity declaration processes. However, the draft manual was never released. Department officials said they would consult with school division administrators to see if they were still interested in this document.

Recommendation 13: We recommend that the Department take steps to ensure that all schools give parents an annual opportunity to declare their children's Aboriginal identity.

Response of officials: The Department will require that all school divisions provide parents an opportunity to declare their children's identity on an annual basis, and incorporate the *Aboriginal Identity Self-Declaration* on their main student registration form.

2. Gaps in supporting school division delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives

2.1 Funding processes need improvement

2.1.1 Funding allocations do not adequately consider where funds are most needed

The Department's processes for allocating the 2 largest grants to school divisions that are targeted to Aboriginal students do not adequately consider whether the funds are being allocated to the school divisions (and schools) where they are most needed. The Department uses 2 different processes to allocate its AAA and BSSAP grants to school divisions. Both are described further below. Neither method requires the consideration of the Department's Aboriginal student identity data, although AAA funding allocations are primarily based on Aboriginal population data received from Statistics Canada. Perhaps more importantly, neither considers the divisions' measured outcomes for Aboriginal students as an additional factor to help the Department determine need.

Allocation of AAA funding

In 2001/02, AAA funding replaced the Department's English Language Enrichment for Native Students funding, which provided school divisions with per-pupil funding for each Aboriginal student considered 2 or more grades behind. The *Funding of Schools Program Regulation* under *The Public Schools Act* allocates AAA grant funding to all school divisions (but one) using Statistics Canada data on the number of Aboriginal families with children under 19. This data is used to estimate each division's proportion of the province's Aboriginal students. The regulation also sets an amount for the one division where this data is unavailable. In 2014/15, the regulation provided \$642,700 for the one division and allocated \$7.5 million across all the others based on 2006 Statistics Canada data. Individual grants ranged from \$15,000 to \$2.07 million per division. The average grant amount was \$225,978 and the median amount was \$97,500.

The Statistics Canada data used by the Department is only available every 5 years and counts the number of families with children, not the number of school-aged children. As a result, some school divisions may be under or over funded. We noted that both British Columbia and Alberta allocate targeted funding for Aboriginal students based on voluntary Aboriginal identity declaration data. Adopting this approach in Manitoba would result in the use of more current data and would count school-age children rather than families. This may incent school divisions to encourage self-identification and to distribute declaration forms annually. However, there are also problems with distributing funding this way. It may not be viewed as appropriate or fair as voluntary self-identification is a personal decision made by parents that school divisions can influence, but not control. Neither method ensures that funds are allocated based on a more fulsome consideration of need that includes measured outcomes for Aboriginal students, in addition to the estimated Aboriginal student population.

We also noted that the Department planned to use updated Statistics Canada data in 2015/16 and that this would result in 7 divisions receiving less funding than in 2014/15, even though the number of Aboriginal families with children in these divisions had stayed the same or increased. This is because these divisions' proportionate share of Aboriginal families with children in relation to other divisions had decreased, and the planned increase to the total funding level (from \$8.1 to \$9.3 million) did not fully offset this. As a one-year transition, the Department guaranteed divisions no decreases from 2014/15 funding levels.

Allocation of BSSAP funding

BSSAP funding is restricted to those divisions originally approved who have chosen to keep reapplying annually. An initial call letter for proposals was sent to all school divisions in 2004. Twenty-four of 36 divisions responded, and 21 had their proposed BSSAP sites approved. Department officials said these initial funding decisions were based on consideration of each division's socio-economic factors.

In 2014/15, 18 divisions (3 of the original 21 had stopped reapplying) received BSSAP funding for 46 sites. The 18 divisions reflected 50% of Manitoba's 36 school divisions and the 46 sites reflected 7% of all potential school sites in Manitoba. Approved BSSAP funding per site ranged from \$1,100 to \$23,400. The average site funding level was \$13,333; the median level was \$15,000.

We compared the Department's Aboriginal student identity data to the listing of BSSAP-funded school divisions. We found 3 school divisions with self-identified Aboriginal student populations well above the provincial average (those where 45-59% of the total student population had self-identified as Aboriginal) that did not receive any BSSAP funding. We also found 5 school divisions with self-identified Aboriginal student populations below the provincial average that were receiving BSSAP funding.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that the Department allocate Aboriginal education funding to school divisions where it is most needed, using a process that considers measured outcomes for Aboriginal student achievement and the estimated Aboriginal student population.

Response of officials: In addition to the AAA grant, the Department provides funding through BSSAP and also provides additional funding and programming support for after school and summer learning programs in certain schools and communities with high numbers of Aboriginal students. For example, Morningstar Initiative – an innovative supportive network of student and family support systems based in R. B. Russell Vocational High School with the goal of promoting health, wellness, and successful graduation.

The Department commits to undertaking a review of the AAA and BSSAP grants to ensure their terms of reference and reporting requirements are in line with identified priorities, and review whether the manner in which other grants provided to divisions to improve Aboriginal academic achievement are appropriately dispersed.

Additionally, Aboriginal education academic achievement will become a key part of the divisional planning process and these plans will help inform programming and funding decisions.

2.1.2 Grant funding disbursed even if funding criteria not met

The Department requires school divisions to submit acceptable plans to obtain their AAA and BSSAP funds. However, we found that the Department released AAA funds even if it found the plans failed to meet stated requirements.

AAA funding approval

Before 2014/15, the Department required school divisions to submit 3-year plans outlining how they intended to use their AAA grants (including planned outcomes, indicators and strategies), but the divisions had considerable discretion as to how they used their grants. In practice, the divisions used their funding for a variety of initiatives, including cultural programming, teacher training, and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula for all students.

Beginning in 2014/15, the Department placed more conditions on the funding to help ensure plans were focused on measurable improvements in Aboriginal student achievement. For funding to be released, the Department required school divisions to submit plans showing that:

- more than 50% of their funding would be spent on activities intended to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- Aboriginal student specific data would be used to plan initiatives, monitor their effectiveness, track student achievement, and report on outcomes.

These 2 new required criteria were communicated to divisions in March 2014. However, the Department did not specify the types of outcomes to measure and report. One division we visited expressed concerns over this.

At the same time, the Department developed a more rigorous and better documented process for reviewing divisions' AAA plans. Department staff completed a standard review form for each plan, documenting whether or not it complied with the 2 new required criteria, plus whether or not it met 5 supplementary criteria related to effective teaching practices. These 5 criteria were recommended, not required, plan elements and were not communicated to the school divisions. After documenting their review, staff could recommend that plans (i) be unconditionally approved; (ii) be approved, but with concerns; or (iii) not be approved. Staff then worked with the divisions to obtain revised plans and resolve concerns as much as possible before releasing the funds.

We reviewed the Department's standard forms and related documents for its 2014/15 review of school divisions' AAA plans. Department staff had initially concluded that 12 of the 36 plans (33%) failed to meet at least 1 of the 2 new requirements, but nonetheless initially recommended approving 6 of these. Staff then followed-up on 8 (67%) of the 12 non-compliant cases and worked with the school divisions to obtain revised plans—but only 6 plans were subsequently revised to meet both criteria.

The remaining 6 non-compliant plans represented 33% of total AAA funding. In most cases (4 of 6), the plans were considered non-compliant because Department staff found the planned use of Aboriginal student-specific data to be deficient. Staff also found that one plan didn't meet the literacy/numeracy requirement, and that one failed to meet both the literacy/numeracy requirement and the data requirement. Department staff also assessed only 8 of the 36 plans (22%) as fully meeting the 5 supplementary criteria regarding effective teaching practices. For example, in some cases Department staff viewed the assessment tools the divisions were proposing to use as culturally inappropriate.

Identified concerns, including non-compliance with the 2 new requirements, did not affect funding levels or result in any funds being withheld. This effectively treated required elements as if they were simply recommended. Department staff told us they intended to work with the divisions over the next year to help them transition to the new requirements. The Department was developing examples of good plans and a resource document to assist divisions in planning and reporting on outcomes. It also planned to deliver regional sessions on using the resource document.

The concerns over division plans identified by Department staff may have resulted from the short timeframe divisions were given to respond to the changes, plus the fact that the Department did not share the 5 supplementary criteria with the school divisions. And some divisions may have found compliance with requirements and criteria too burdensome for sometimes small funding amounts (as little as \$15,000).

The 2009 AAA grant review (described in **section 1.2.2**) included a recommendation that divisions consult with Aboriginal parents and communities in developing their AAA plans. We noted that 7 of the 36 divisions (19%) reported doing this, although there was no requirement to do so. The Department may want to add this consultation process to the criteria it is using to assess AAA plans.

BSSAP funding approval

The Department requires school divisions to submit annual proposals that need to be approved by Department staff before BSSAP funds are released. The Department's website indicated that, to be eligible for funding, school division proposals need to:

- identify improving academic achievement of Aboriginal students as a priority in school and divisional plans.
- involve Aboriginal parents and organizations.
- reflect coherence with the Aboriginal Academic Achievement grant.
- support overall school planning and programming.

Department staff did not document their review of annual BSSAP proposals. As a result we could not assess how the Department assured itself that proposals met the criteria. We therefore reviewed 10 proposals for sites funded in 2013/14 and found that all described strategies to involve Aboriginal parents in school activities, but generally did not speak to the other requirements.

Recommendation 15: We recommend that the Department communicate all AAA and BSSAP funding requirements to school divisions, and that it demonstrate through a documented review that all requirements are met before funding is released.

Response of officials: The Department is working directly with school divisions to develop divisional and school plans that address key priorities, in particular, academic achievement. The Department is committed to providing direct support to school divisions in the planning and monitoring process so that AAA and BSSAP are in line with funding requirements and timelines. Furthermore, documented reviews will take place to ensure desired outcomes are met.

2.1.3 Some improvement to grant recipient reporting processes underway

School divisions are required to submit reports showing what they accomplished with their AAA and BSSAP funds. We found that these reports contained mostly anecdotal information, but that the Department was implementing changes to make its AAA reporting process more rigorous. This is consistent with our recommendation in **section 1.2.1** that, whenever possible, the Department monitor quantified output and outcomes measures, as well as anecdotal information, for its key initiatives. AAA and BSSAP reporting processes are described further below.

AAA grant reporting

Until 2014/15, school divisions were required to submit annual financial reports detailing how their AAA grant funding was spent, plus reports every 3 years detailing what was accomplished with the funding. The latter were supposed to be linked to outcomes and indicators listed in the 3-year plans previously submitted. However, most were more anecdotal accounts of activities undertaken, generally lacking evidence indicating whether the strategies employed had been effective in improving student academic success.

We reviewed 11 of the divisions' tri-annual reports submitted in 2013/14, plus their related divisional plans. We found that 7 divisions had plans with information on intended student outcomes and 6 had reports with some quantified results for planned outcomes (for example, the percent of Aboriginal students working at or above grade level in the areas of literacy and numeracy). None reported on all the intended outcomes stated in their plans.

In 2014/15, the Department began requiring school divisions to submit all reports annually. It also put a much greater focus on the use of Aboriginal student specific data to report on outcomes, requiring plans to describe how this data would be used to report on progress. **Section 2.1.2** describes this (and other plan requirements the Department initiated in 2014/15) in greater detail. None of these new reports were available at the time of our audit because the Department did not require them to be submitted until the fall of 2015. We were therefore unable to assess how well this new process was working. The Department also transferred responsibility for reviewing these reports from the School Programs Division to the Directorate in 2015/16.

BSSAP grant reporting

The Department requires school divisions receiving BSSAP funding to submit annual reports. Similar to the AAA grant reports submitted to the Department before 2014/15, we found that these included mostly anecdotal information and often did not report on outcomes achieved using measurable indicators for Aboriginal parent engagement and student success. At the time of our audit, the Department had no plans to make the BSSAP grant reporting process more rigorous.

2.2 Few supports for transitions from on-reserve to provincial schools

Many First Nations students living on reserves must attend provincial schools to complete high school since only 22 of 63 First Nations bands in Manitoba provide educational programming to Grade 12. As of September 30, 2014, the Department's records showed that there were 5,890 of these students. In addition, First Nations families may move off reserve, so there are many other First Nations students who also transition to provincial schools.

First Nations students may experience many challenges in transitioning to schools off-reserve. While adjusting to a new environment, they may feel lonely, intimidated, and culturally displaced. They may experience stereotyping and racism. They may also find different learning experiences and expectations in provincial schools than in on-reserve schools.

There are also funding challenges associated with transitioning students. First Nations may find gaps between the federal funding received for students living on reserve and the amounts they are being billed by school divisions for these students. The federal government only sometimes adjusts for this gap. And school divisions may encounter challenges establishing where a student's legal guardian lives, which in turn determines eligibility for provincial education funding.

2.2.1 Limited guidance to support student transitions

In 2010, the Department developed a guide for schools, *Supporting Students in Transition: Sharing Student Information between First Nations and Provincial Schools*. The guide was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. It discusses the sharing of information between schools, roles and responsibilities, and provides a list of matters for receiving schools to consider when supporting students in transition. Department officials said they planned to develop a student transition handbook for schools that would consist of a collection of best practices for addressing the matters raised, but that the loss of a project partner postponed this indefinitely. The Department generally offers related training when it issues new guides, but it did not offer training on use of its transition guide. Staff in only 1 of the 4 divisions we visited said they were aware of it.

Both Saskatchewan and Ontario have issued guides to help school divisions and First Nations develop education agreements for when First Nations send students to provincial schools. The guides provide information on the types of matters to include in agreements, accountability mechanisms, the calculation of tuition fees (including the costs to be included and excluded, in an effort to make the fees transparent and ensure they are determined fairly), and processes for resolving disagreements. British Columbia sets a First Nations billing rate for each school district

to use as a guide. And, at the time of our audit, Alberta was working on developing education agreement standards.

Education agreements can help set out roles, responsibilities, and processes. They can also define common goals and targets, and instill a sense of partnership between First Nations and school divisions. Both sending and receiving schools need to work cooperatively to prepare students and support student success.

In 2010, in consultation with First Nations and school divisions, the Department developed *Towards a Partnership for Learning: A Resource Guide for Developing Education Services Agreements Where First Nations Send Students to Provincial Schools*. It discussed transition challenges, tuition and funding issues, and experiences in other provinces. It also suggested protocols and principles to embed in agreements, and provided some sample excerpts from agreements in use in Manitoba and other provinces. However, the guide was never released.

In 2013/14, First Nations paid student tuition totaling \$53.7 million to provincial school divisions, most (\$36.6 million) to one northern division. Signed agreements between First Nations and school divisions set out the related tuition amounts. For 3 of the 4 divisions we visited, the agreements were basic forms that set fees for each individual student. The other division had a more comprehensive education agreement, setting out in detail how tuition costs were to be calculated, how transportation costs would be handled, and how the First Nation and the division would work together on various other matters. The process for determining the tuition amount varied among the 4 divisions, but staff from each said they set the amount on a cost-recovery basis.

Officials from all 4 divisions said they dealt with late tuition payments, but that these were resolved over time, sometimes with the assistance of the Department. Most said they had no need for the Department to provide guidance on tuition agreements, but one suggested tuition agreement processes might be smoother if the Department negotiated tuition rates on behalf of the divisions.

Recommendation 16: We recommend that the Department issue guidance detailing best practices for achieving successful transitions for First Nations students.

Response of officials: The Department is establishing a new First Nations Transition Fund to help assist students moving from First Nations schools to Manitoba public schools. The Department will work directly with school divisions and First Nations education partners to ensure this fund helps address barriers faced by transitioning First Nations students.

Recommendation 17: We recommend that the Department issue guidance to help school divisions and First Nations develop education agreements that support First Nations students transitioning from on-reserve to provincial schools.

Response of officials: Initiatives to develop education agreements between First Nations and school divisions needs to come from the local level and be based on local circumstances. The Department will support the development of these partnership agreements, upon request, and consult with school divisions and First Nations to determine the types and forms of guidance and resources they require in developing the partnership agreements.

2.2.2 Minimal targeted funding for student transitions

In special circumstances, the Department gives grants (apart from its AAA grants) to school divisions to support cooperative planning between the divisions and surrounding First Nations. At the time of our audit, the Department provided 3 annual grants totaling \$165,000 to 3 school divisions with large numbers of transitioning First Nations students. The grants were used to cover a variety of costs. In one division, the grant helped to cover the salary of a social worker and the incremental cost of running a school bus later than dismissal time so that students living on reserves could feel like part of the school community by participating in after-school activities.

The Department also administers and funds the Student Transition Project, which is designed to support First Nations students transitioning to the public school system. Department officials said the 4 participating schools were selected based on discussions with MFNERC about which schools most needed assistance. Department staff then worked with each school to identify and implement best practices. In 2013/14, the Department began providing annual funding of \$6,000 to each of the 4 schools.

While all of these grants were given to school divisions with some of the highest numbers of on-reserve students attending public schools, some of the divisions without similar funding had an equal or higher number of these students, likely with similar support needs.

School divisions may provide support to transitioning First Nations students without any specific additional funding from the Department, either through their AAA grants or other funding sources. Only one of the school divisions we visited received additional provincial funding for transition assistance. But all 4 school divisions provided some support to varying degrees. This ranged from intensive support for students moving from their community to a high-school dormitory to a partnership with a non-profit organization that paired students with mentors to teach them about living in the city. Some divisions may not have the capacity to provide sufficient student transition supports.

Recommendation 6 in **section 1.1.7** recommends that the Department align its total funding for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students with its related goals, objectives, intended outcomes, and targets. **Recommendation 14** in **section 2.1.1** recommends that this funding be allocated to where it is most needed. Implementation of these recommendations would help address transition support issues.

2.3 Teacher resources and training in place

2.3.1 Integration of Aboriginal history and perspectives into curricula on-going

As stated on its website, in 1995 the Department requested that all schools incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into all curricula. In 2003, it published a non-mandatory related guidance document: *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula*. The document states that "to correct historical

and social biases that have developed, greater integration of Aboriginal perspectives into existing and future curricula is necessary." It further states, "Each subject area will address the perspectives and accomplishments of Aboriginal peoples."

In response to the need for additional Aboriginal curricula, the Department has developed an optional full-credit course for Grade 12 students, *Current Topics in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies*. It has also developed a K-12 Aboriginal Languages curriculum framework document. And it has incorporated Aboriginal perspectives into some of the mandatory learning outcomes and teaching ideas listed in its other curriculum documents.

We reviewed the curriculum framework documents for core subjects: English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Only the Social Studies curricula for Grades 2 to 11 and the Science curriculum for Grade 4 included mandatory learning outcomes related to Aboriginal perspectives or culture. And only about half of the curriculum framework documents included ideas for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into teaching.

Subsequent to our audit, the Province introduced proposed legislation that will require its *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (discussed in **section 1.1.1**) to "set out criteria for ensuring that the curriculum reflects the perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples."

The Department has developed additional resources (supplementary to its curricula documents) to help teachers incorporate Aboriginal perspectives when teaching different curricula. They are mostly focused on the Social Studies curricula and are available on the Department's website and at its Instructional Resources Unit. Also, the Department's process for reviewing and approving teaching resources considers whether the resources have appropriately incorporated Aboriginal perspectives.

The Department also supports outside organizations developing teaching resources. For example, the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba developed its recently released K-12 teaching resource package and related teaching materials (designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the Treaties and Treaty relationships) through consultation with a number of partners, including the Department.

Staff in the 4 school divisions we visited all reported using the Department's resources. They also reported accessing (and in some cases developing) additional resources. Staff from one division stated they would like to see greater infusion of Aboriginal perspectives into curricula. And staff from 2 divisions said the Department could better support them by providing more Aboriginal language resources. At the time of our audit, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations, school divisions, and post-secondary institutions, the Department was planning the development of an Aboriginal languages strategy.

The 2009 AAA grant review recommended that the Department, in collaboration with school divisions, develop a bundle of learning resources (such as lists of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and anthologies of personal stories) to support the development of culturally responsive schools. The Department hoped that its Manitoba Professional Learning Environment (MAPLE) website would allow teachers to more widely share information on teaching resources, including resources for Aboriginal education. MAPLE membership is open to all Manitoba educators, school

clinicians, and Department staff, and allows users to set up various groups and share information. However, none of the school division officials in the 4 divisions we visited mentioned MAPLE as a method used for sharing resources.

Recommendation 18: We recommend that the Department promote use of its Manitoba Professional Learning Environment (MAPLE) website to share resources and practices found to be effective in improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: The Department will explore ways to take better advantage of the MAPLE website to share resources and practices found to be effective in improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Recommendation 19 We recommend that the Department develop a process to ensure that all curricula documents include ideas to help teachers incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into lesson plans and teaching methods.

Response of officials: The Government of Manitoba has introduced legislation that includes a requirement that the new *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Framework* include “criteria for ensuring the curriculum reflects the perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.” Work on the *Framework* is underway and will describe the process for ensuring that the curriculum development activities support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into teaching.

The Department has worked with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and other Aboriginal education partners to develop curriculum resources to support a significant focus on Aboriginal histories, cultures, traditional knowledge and perspectives in the classroom.

The Department has committed to a review of outcomes for Social Studies curriculum to identify areas where the learning outcomes related to cultural contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, the legacy of residential schools, as well as the Sixty’s Scoop can be strengthened.

More recently, in recognition of the prominent relationship between language and culture in nurturing emotional, physical and spiritual student wellbeing, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, post-secondary institutions and school boards established the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy to “protect and promote” Aboriginal languages.

The Department continues to provide training on an as needed basis to Grade nine and eleven teachers on the implementation of the *From Apology to Reconciliation: Residential School Survivors - A Guide for Grades 9 and 11 Social Studies Teachers in Manitoba*.

New resources are being developed with partners and teachers to assist classroom teachers to effectively incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. Significant professional development for in-service teachers through for example, A Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency, a four day professional learning initiative intended to enhance teachers’ confidence and capacities to include Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum has been provided in the past to teachers and will continue to be offered along with an array of initiatives intended to enhance professional learning opportunities for all educators. Additionally, all teachers in training in the Faculties of Education must take 3 credit hours pre-service course on Aboriginal perspectives.

2.3.2 Pre- and post-certification teacher training both include Aboriginal perspectives

Pre-certification teacher training

Effective September 2008, the Department required all university faculties of education in Manitoba to implement a mandatory 3-credit-hour course focusing on the foundational basics of Aboriginal perspectives. And in June 2015, the Manitoba government announced that it would work with post-secondary institutions to develop a strategy for introducing more Indigenous content into bachelor of education courses.

We reviewed the currently required 3-credit-hour Aboriginal perspectives course descriptions of 3 Manitoba universities and found that the focus of each varied. Some focused on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum; others focused on Aboriginal history and culture. We also reviewed 20 files of teachers certified in Manitoba in 2014 and found that they had all completed the mandatory course. The Directorate surveyed teachers in 2013 and found that 38% of the respondents working in provincial schools reported completing a university-credit course in Aboriginal perspectives as part of their pre-certification training.

Post-certification teacher training

At the time of our audit, the Department had 8 different workshops available to school divisions related to Aboriginal education, although these were not all listed on a designated web page so that school divisions could see what was available. Department staff also sometimes helped education stakeholders develop their own Aboriginal education training materials, and participated in their workshops and conferences. In addition, the 4 school divisions we visited had their own training workshops related to Aboriginal education, supplementing those offered by the Department.

The Department also periodically brought together divisional staff participating in AAA and BSSAP projects to share their experiences. However, not all divisions shared in BSSAP learnings as they did not all receive BSSAP funding. The MAPLE website (described in **section 2.3.1**) may be a useful tool to more widely share these learnings and best practices.

According to the Directorate's participation statistics, 28 of Manitoba's 36 school divisions and 4 First Nations had participated in its training session, *A Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency*. But Department officials did not keep participation statistics for the other training sessions it offered. They did, however, gather survey data on teacher participation in professional learning activities (which may have been offered by the Department, a school division, or another organization). A voluntary survey administered by the Directorate in 2013 showed that 51% of the provincial school teachers responding reported participating in at least one professional learning activity related to Aboriginal perspectives in the last 3 years. Reported participation rates varied by school division, ranging from 13% to 85%.

The Department did not consistently have the participants in their training sessions complete evaluation forms. Better information on the number of participants attending training sessions and whether or not they found the training sessions useful would help the Department ensure that its professional learning opportunities are meeting teachers' needs. **Recommendation 7** in **section 1.2.1** addresses the need to better track quantified data for all key initiatives related to the goal of improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

2.3.3 Slow progress in increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers

CMEC documents note that having Aboriginal teachers in schools can benefit Aboriginal students by serving as positive role models, reducing teacher bias in assessment and student perception of bias, facilitating a generally more constructive and culturally relevant relationship between the student and the school, and positively influencing non-Aboriginal colleagues and students. Also, the Action Plan noted that “having Aboriginal teachers in the classroom represents the first line of change in the education of children and youth”. Therefore, one of the key initiatives associated with the Action Plan was increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the province.

There are 3 post-secondary institutions in Manitoba offering Bachelor of Education programs specifically tailored for Aboriginal university students: the University College of the North, the University of Winnipeg (in partnership with Seven Oaks and Winnipeg school divisions), and Brandon University. The latter 2 both offer specialized Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Arts degree programs for Aboriginal people already working as educational assistants. The Department’s data showed 43 graduates from the 3 programs in 2012/13.

The Directorate periodically surveys teachers to assess the number of self-identified Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba. The 2013 survey found that about 9% of teachers in provincial schools self-identified as Aboriginal (6% in 2006). Although the percentage was increasing, it was not increasing quite as fast as the percentage of students self-identifying as Aboriginal. The 2013 gap between the percentage of teachers and students self-identifying as Aboriginal was 10% (9% in 2006). And, in individual school divisions, the gap ranged from 0% to 47%.

At the time of our audit, Directorate officials told us that, together with its post-secondary advisory committee, it was working on a new strategy for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba.

Summary of recommendations and responses of officials

Planning, monitoring, and public reporting

Planning

1. We recommend that the Department adopt a unified and coordinated approach to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, ensuring that it engages all key partners and prevents any unnecessary duplication of effort across the Province's different plans and initiatives.

Response of officials: Aboriginal education has been and continues to be a Departmental priority, having been identified as one of the five priorities in the Department Plan. The Department has committed to adopting a unified, coordinated approach that will be embodied in *The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. This *Framework* will incorporate the Department's previous *Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan: Bridging Two Worlds* and outline key initiatives that are intended to ensure all students and teachers learn about Aboriginal histories and increase Aboriginal student success, post-secondary participation and educational attainment. The Government of Manitoba has also introduced legislation to enshrine the requirement for this *Framework*, along with a requirement to renew it every three years to ensure that it remains current and relevant.

Additionally, a new Manitoba Coalition for Indigenous Education consisting of Aboriginal partners, post-secondary institutions, education, business, labor and community leaders, will be formed to advance the goal of raising Indigenous post-secondary participation and attainment rates to the provincial average. The Coalition will encompass efforts currently underway at all levels – from early childhood to adult education – to address barriers to educational success.

2. We recommend that the Department provide leadership and develop mechanisms to ensure a greater focus on planning and implementing initiatives to improve educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, and that it clearly define and communicate responsibilities and accountabilities for achieving results to all parties, including the Directorate and school divisions.

Response of officials: The Department will continue to provide leadership and strengthen its approach to planning and implementing initiatives that improve Aboriginal student achievement. *The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will include new expectations and responsibilities for the Department regarding planning, assessing and publically reporting on Aboriginal education. This includes developing and establishing detailed terms of reference and, in consultation with school divisions, setting clear divisional roles and responsibilities for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

3. We recommend that the Department ensure that its implementation plan for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students is based on a comprehensive understanding of the related key initiatives already underway in government departments and school divisions, both to avoid possible duplication of effort and to identify gaps where additional supports are needed.

Response of officials: The Department meets regularly with a variety of partners such as Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and the two Aboriginal Education Directorates' Advisory Councils (which provides to the Deputy Minister an annual report with recommendations to support K-12 and post-secondary success) to share and discuss the range of programs and initiatives in the province that are necessary for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students as well as to identify gaps where additional supports may be needed.

To further support these efforts, the Department will develop new resources that identify and summarize key programs, actions, and initiatives, delivered by the Department, government, school divisions, Aboriginal organizations and community partners that impact K-12 Aboriginal students. Once developed, these resources will be used to inform Department planning and implementation. They will also be communicated to school divisions and other partners through correspondence, provincial gatherings, and workshops thereby decreasing the likelihood of duplication of efforts and increasing the opportunity for education partners and divisions to learn from existing promising practices and programs.

4. We recommend that the Department identify the key barriers to success faced by Aboriginal students in Manitoba, assess whether each of these barriers and the Department's objectives and intended outcomes for Aboriginal students are being sufficiently addressed by current initiatives, and take steps to remedy gaps.

Response of officials: The Department has been using a variety of sources of information and research studies to identify barriers to Aboriginal students' success. It has been an active supporter of research, including Making Education Work a five year, \$6 million research project jointly funded at \$3 million each by the Province of Manitoba and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. The project was intended to evaluate whether the provision of additional in-school supports and services would assist Grade 10 to 12 Aboriginal students in staying in school, meeting graduation requirements and entering a post-secondary program.

Most recently, the Department has been studying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and Call to Action to further our understanding of the key barriers to success faced by Aboriginal students in Manitoba and how they can be addressed.

In addition, the Department has been taking a close look at what the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative has been doing, which has resulted in noteworthy Aboriginal student academic success and we are also examining the Vancouver School Board's system of tracking Indigenous student achievement.

The Department further supports various research forums such as Shawane Dagoiwin Aboriginal Education Research Forum that provide opportunities for a shared understanding of research pertaining to the interests of Aboriginal peoples and communities. The Department sits at various provincial and national working tables to help to identify effective programming to address barriers to student learning and success.

Going forward, as part of *The Manitoba First Nations, Métis, Inuit Education Policy Framework* the Department will use provincial assessment data to complement other sources of research and information to identify barriers and work further with our partners to develop potential solutions.

5. We recommend that the Department set specific and measurable short- and long-term targets for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: In fall 2014, the Department reorganized staff and resources to create the Student Achievement Support Unit to work directly with school divisions to develop divisional plans that address academic achievement for all students. Building on this, the Department will work with its partners to identify realistic and meaningful short and long term targets for requesting improved educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

6. We recommend that the Department align the total funding for improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students with the Department's stated goals, objectives, intended outcomes, and targets for these students.

Response of officials: As part of the Funding of Schools package for the 2014/15 school year, the Department changed the terms and reporting requirements for the Aboriginal Academic Achievement (AAA) Grant, directing that at least 50% of the funding be targeted to improving literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students. The remainder of the funding can be allocated toward culturally appropriate learning that otherwise supports the educational and academic success of Aboriginal students. The Department commits to undertaking a similar review of the Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) Grant to ensure its terms of reference and reporting requirements are in line with identified priorities.

Monitoring and public reporting

7. We recommend that the Department monitor and report on the results of key initiatives related to improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students using quantified output and outcome measures (whenever possible), and that it regularly review and update its implementation plans to reflect what is found to be effective.

Response of officials: The Department provides leadership, direction and support to school divisions regarding reporting requirements and outcome measures. The Department will continue to work with school divisions to develop new reporting processes to improve transparency and accountability, at the same time as developing realistic and measurable targets. Regular reviews and updates about effective programs and initiatives will be part of the renewal and evaluation process that is embedded in *the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. The Department is also committed to working with school divisions and Aboriginal educational partners to utilize various planning and reporting processes to monitor and assess the impact of key initiatives on outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students and use this and other sources of information (quantitative and qualitative) to inform policy, programming and funding directions.

8. We recommend that the Department conduct more evidence-based evaluations of the programs and projects designed to improve educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students, and use the results to inform planning and funding decisions.

Response of officials: As a member of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, Manitoba plays a key role in strengthening the capacity for evidence-based decision making through actions that include: (a) establishing an approach to encourage Aboriginal students to self-identify (based on successful work previously undertaken by the Department), (b) coordinating common data and indicator definitions, and (c) initiating comparable data-collection procedures.

A number of funding agreements with school divisions currently include a divisional requirement to evaluate the impact of programs on Aboriginal students and these will be strengthened.

The Department has already started to improve monitoring and assessment and evaluation processes to ensure the educational outcomes continue to inform planning, implementation and

action including funding decisions. Furthermore, in response to the recommendation, the Department will work with its partners to conduct more evidence-based evaluations of programs and projects designed to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

9. We recommend that the Department regularly monitor performance data showing the level of progress being made towards all of its publicly stated intended outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students and that it share this data with those accountable for achieving results.

Response of officials: The Department will track and monitor performance indicators specified in the *First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* to assess the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students.

The Department will also prepare and publicly release (annual) key indicators of student achievement including reporting on Aboriginal achievement.

10. We recommend that the Department disaggregate and analyze Aboriginal student achievement data by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student identifiers to better understand trends and to develop appropriate student supports.

Response of officials: Moving forward, the Department will disaggregate and analyze Aboriginal student performance data by First Nation, Métis and Inuit student identifiers to better comprehend issues, trends and patterns and where necessary to develop appropriate student supports for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

11. We recommend that the Department analyze Aboriginal student achievement data by school division in order to identify those with better results and the underlying successful practices that could be applied more broadly across all divisions.

Response of officials: The Department will analyze school division Aboriginal student achievement data with a view towards identifying divisions with (evidence of) higher rates of student success and engage in discussions with those divisions to determine the reasons for those potentially promising educational practices. This will build on the Department's commitment to develop and share resources that outline existing programs and initiatives that have shown success.

12. We recommend that the Department publicly report annual measured results showing its progress in achieving its stated goals and intended outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: The *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will include a 3-year reporting cycle on the progress of its activities and intended outcomes. The Department will track and monitor performance indicators specified in the *Framework* to assess the impact of initiatives on Aboriginal students.

The Department will also prepare and publicly report (on an annual basis) key indicators of student achievement including reporting on Aboriginal student achievement.

13. We recommend that the Department take steps to ensure that all schools give parents an annual opportunity to declare their children's Aboriginal identity.

Response of officials: The Department will require that all school divisions provide parents an opportunity to declare their children's identity on an annual basis, and incorporate the *Aboriginal Identity Self-Declaration* on their main student registration form.

Supporting school division delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives

Funding

14. We recommend that the Department allocate Aboriginal education funding to school divisions where it is most needed, using a process that considers measured outcomes for Aboriginal student achievement and the estimated Aboriginal student population.

Response of officials: In addition to the AAA grant, the Department provides funding through BSSAP and also provides additional funding and programming support for after school and summer learning programs in certain schools and communities with high numbers of Aboriginal students. For example, Morningstar Initiative – an innovative supportive network of student and family support systems based in R. B. Russell Vocational High School with the goal of promoting health, wellness, and successful graduation.

The Department commits to undertaking a review of the AAA and BSSAP grants to ensure their terms of reference and reporting requirements are in line with identified priorities, and review whether the manner in which other grants provided to divisions to improve Aboriginal academic achievement are appropriately dispersed.

Additionally, Aboriginal education academic achievement will become a key part of the divisional planning process and these plans will help inform programming and funding decisions.

15. We recommend that the Department communicate all AAA and BSSAP funding requirements to school divisions, and that it demonstrate through a documented review that all requirements are met before funding is released.

Response of officials: The Department is working directly with school divisions to develop divisional and school plans that address key priorities, in particular, academic achievement. The Department is committed to providing direct support to school divisions in the planning and monitoring process so that AAA and BSSAP are in line with funding requirements and timelines. Furthermore, documented reviews will take place to ensure desired outcomes are met.

Transition and other supports

16. We recommend that the Department issue guidance detailing best practices for achieving successful transitions for First Nations students.

Response of officials: The Department is establishing a new First Nations Transition Fund to help assist students moving from First Nations schools to Manitoba public schools. The Department will work directly with school divisions and First Nations education partners to ensure this fund helps address barriers faced by transitioning First Nations students.

17. We recommend that the Department issue guidance to help school divisions and First Nations develop education agreements that support First Nations students transitioning from on-reserve to provincial schools.

Response of officials: Initiatives to develop education agreements between First Nations and school divisions needs to come from the local level and be based on local circumstances. The Department will support the development of these partnership agreements, upon request, and consult with school divisions and First Nations to determine the types and forms of guidance and resources they require in developing the partnership agreements.

18. We recommend that the Department promote use of its Manitoba Professional Learning Environment (MAPLE) website to share resources and practices found to be effective in improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

Response of officials: The Department will explore ways to take better advantage of the MAPLE website to share resources and practices found to be effective in improving educational outcomes for K-12 Aboriginal students.

19. We recommend that the Department develop a process to ensure that all curricula documents include ideas to help teachers incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into lesson plans and teaching methods.

Response of officials: The Government of Manitoba has introduced legislation that includes a requirement that the new *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Framework* include “criteria for ensuring the curriculum reflects the perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.” Work on the *Framework* is underway and will describe the process for ensuring that the curriculum development activities support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into teaching.

The Department has worked with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and other Aboriginal education partners to develop curriculum resources to support a significant focus on Aboriginal histories, cultures, traditional knowledge and perspectives in the classroom.

The Department has committed to a review of outcomes for Social Studies curriculum to identify areas where the learning outcomes related to cultural contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, the legacy of residential schools, as well as the Sixty’s Scoop can be strengthened.

More recently, in recognition of the prominent relationship between language and culture in nurturing emotional, physical and spiritual student wellbeing, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups, post-secondary institutions and school boards established the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy to “protect and promote” Aboriginal languages.

The Department continues to provide training on an as needed basis to Grade nine and eleven teachers on the implementation of the *From Apology to Reconciliation: Residential School Survivors - A Guide for Grades 9 and 11 Social Studies Teachers in Manitoba*.

New resources are being developed with partners and teachers to assist classroom teachers to effectively incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. Significant professional development for in-service teachers through for example, A Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency, a four day professional learning initiative intended to enhance teachers’ confidence and capacities to include Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum has been provided in the past to teachers and will continue to be offered along with an array of initiatives intended to enhance professional learning opportunities for all educators. Additionally, all teachers in training in the Faculties of Education must take 3 credit hours pre-service course on Aboriginal perspectives.

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