

## Call to Action

- 7) We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

## Funding inequities

Present-day Aboriginal education in Canada is made up of a mix of models. The federal government funds schools on reserves, with the actual operation of those schools often delegated to the local First Nation. Aboriginal children who do not live on reserves are educated through the provincial or territorial school systems. In addition, there are a few education systems completely run and managed by First Nations through self-government and other types of intergovernmental agreements.

There are approximately 72,000 students attending 518 First Nation schools.<sup>56</sup> Despite those numbers, many children must still leave their homes and families behind if they wish to obtain a higher education, even at the high school level.

Since 1973, the Government of Canada has claimed that it is committed to devolving control of education to First Nations people.<sup>57</sup> However, the interpretation of “Indian control” offered by the Government of Canada bears little resemblance to the vision of First Nations. The government’s version of the term has entailed the devolution of federal education programs to First Nations, without the benefit of adequate funding or statutory authority.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, when devolution began, it was designed to occur without any additional expense. This meant that former Indian Affairs-operated schools, which were already substandard compared with provincial norms, were handed over to the First Nation bands to run, but without giving the bands the means to operate them effectively. As a result, the curriculum for the majority of First Nation schools is virtually identical to that found in the provincial and territorial schools.<sup>59</sup> This approach is not significantly different from the approach during the residential school era, when Indigenous communities had no say in the content and language of their children’s schooling.

The funding formula for First Nations schools was last updated in 1996, and does not take into account the range of basic and contemporary education components needed to deliver a good-quality education in the twenty-first century, such as information and communication technologies, sports and recreation, language proficiency, and library services.<sup>60</sup> Worse still, since 1996, funding growth for First Nations education has been capped at 2%, an amount that has been insufficient to keep pace with either inflation or the rapid increases in the Aboriginal student population.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, between 1996 and 2006, funding to provincial and territorial school systems increased annually by 3.8%, almost double the increase for reserve schools.<sup>62</sup> The underfunding of reserve schools