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• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): Good evening, everyone.

[*English*]

I call this meeting to order.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to the fifty-second meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[*English*]

We acknowledge that we are meeting today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format.

I will not go into detail, as I know members are familiar with this approach.

[*English*]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting in French, English and Inuktitut. You have the choice, using the little globe icon at the bottom of the screen, of either floor, English or French. Please select your language now. If interpretation is lost this evening, tell us, and we'll stop until we can solve the problem.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You know how to mute and unmute yourselves.

[*Translation*]

Please address the chair.

[*English*]

Finally and very importantly, when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly so that the interpreters can do their job.

With regard to a speaking list, I already have that, so we don't need to talk about it.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee in November, the committee is beginning its study of improving graduation rates for indigenous students, examining the

whole question of indigenous education from kindergarten all the way through the secondary school level.

Today on our panel, as we begin this first session, we have the honour of having Cassidy Caron, president of the Métis National Council; as well as Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. He is accompanied by Jenny Tierney, director of policy advancement at ITK.

Welcome to all of you.

You are veterans of this committee, so I think you know that we start with your providing a five-minute introductory opening and then go to questions.

If everybody is fine, we'll begin the proceedings right away.

I invite President Caron to start it off with her opening remarks.

Ms. Cassidy Caron (President, Métis National Council): Great. Thank you so much.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The Métis National Council and its governing members view education as a lifelong pursuit. Improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Métis are key goals of ours.

I'm here as president of the Métis National Council, which has been the recognized national and international representative of the Métis nation in Canada since 1983. The Métis National Council is composed of and receives its mandate from democratically elected leadership within the provincial Métis governments currently within the provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

Métis people have faced historical and ongoing challenges in accessing and succeeding in education, due to such factors as systemic discrimination, poverty and cultural dislocation. Research shows that Métis people tend to have lower educational attainment than non-indigenous Canadians, with higher rates of high school dropout and lower rates of post-secondary graduation.

Métis students also tend to have lower academic performance than non-indigenous students, with lower scores on standardized tests and lower rates of grade progression. These educational disparities can have significant consequences for Métis individuals and for the well-being and prosperity of our communities and nation, including limited employment opportunities and lower incomes, higher crime rates, and poorer health and mortality outcomes.

Addressing these disparities requires recognizing and addressing systemic barriers to Métis education as well as promoting culturally responsive education that recognizes the unique realities of Métis families and values Métis culture and knowledge.

Although Canada's Constitution recognizes Métis as one of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, historically neither federal nor provincial governments have wanted to assume jurisdictional responsibility for Métis, especially with regard to education. As of today, Métis control of Métis K-to-12 education remains an elusive goal. Even the ability to influence the system to support Métis students continues to be a challenge. For example, the development of a Métis-specific program for K-to-12 education lags far behind similar programs for other indigenous peoples. Métis education infrastructure is almost non-existent in the major metropolitan areas within the homeland. Métis educational resources are often made possible only by diverting resources away from other program areas.

In the K-to-12 system, Métis parents and/or guardians are often reluctant to self-identify their children, because current pan-indigenous programs do not adequately represent Métis cultural, linguistic and historical values. Furthermore, our MNC governing members are currently unable to access accurate disaggregated data on Métis students.

In order to improve the educational outcomes for Métis students, we recognize the need to look beyond simply the provincial educational systems themselves. Removing barriers to educational attainment also includes closing socio-economic gaps that exist between the Métis nation and non-indigenous Canadian populations. Currently the Métis nation governing members have advanced in the delivery of programs and services with regard to early learning and child care, as well as supports for post-secondary education and for skills and employment training. There remains a clear gap between the two in terms of K-to-12 education, though much can be done to support the Métis nation in improving Métis educational outcomes.

This year, through our permanent bilateral mechanism with Canada, we agreed to focus one of our priority areas on K-to-12 education, with a goal of entering into a 10-year Canada-Métis nation kindergarten to grade 12 education accord to improve education outcomes for Métis nation students across the Métis homeland. Such an accord would seek federal investment over 10 years to support Métis students and improve Métis educational outcomes.

This can be done through the development and implementation of Métis-specific education programs, the development of educational infrastructure, the creation of Métis-specific classroom and teaching resources as well as at-home educational resources for families, and investment into the professional development of

Métis educators so that Métis learners can see themselves reflected in the public education system.

Long-term, stable funding for our Métis governments to be able to invest in Métis education is essential to ensure that our MNC governing members have the capacity for long-term planning and the design and delivery of education programs that support Métis citizens' goals and priorities. Ultimately, however, we believe Métis educational outcomes can and will be improved through the recognition of the inherent Métis right to self-government and Métis control over Métis education.

• (1735)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Caron.

We'll now go to Mr. Obed for five minutes.

Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): *Nakurmiik.*

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Also, it's good to see committee members again.

As you implied, I am a regular here and I always appreciate our conversation.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the representational voice for Canada's approximately 70,000 Inuit. The majority of our population lives in Inuit Nunangat, which makes up 40% of Canada's land mass and approximately 72% of Canada's coastline.

Inuit co-manage or own the entirety of that space, and our elected leaders, who comprise the board of directors of ITK, are the rights holders for that space. They are the Nunatsiavut Government, Makivik in Nunavik, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in the Northwest Territories.

The foundation of our modern treaties, our comprehensive land claim agreements, has been a part of the renewal of the relationship between the Inuit and the Crown, but not completely. Education falls outside of the boundaries of most of our land claim agreements, but not all, which then requires us to do more meaningful work with the federal government in the area of K-to-12 education, early learning, post-secondary education and lifelong learning.

The state of neglect after a century of unpredictable approaches for governing education in Inuit Nunangat—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am sorry to interrupt Mr. Obed, but I do not have access to the interpretation.

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

We'll just interrupt for a second to try re-establish—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I now hear the interpretation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Everything seems to be working fine now.

[*English*]

Please resume, Mr. Obed.

Mr. Natan Obed: The state of neglect is palpable in the outcomes. Our outcomes are still quite different from those of the rest of Canadians.

The generations of unpredictable relationships for education, underfunding or the complete abandonment of responsibilities have led to scenarios perhaps like the situation of the Governor General of this country, who grew up in Quebec but because of Quebec policies was not offered education in French. She is trying to learn that language now.

It highlights the unacceptable realities that Inuit have faced over time, and the ongoing systemic racism and lack of respect for our lived realities when we come into scenarios in which we are asserting ourselves and our aspirations through higher roles within this country.

For years, the federal government has maintained that it does not have jurisdiction over any aspect of education in Inuit communities despite exercising jurisdiction within areas of first nations education, such as through the provision of funding for first nations language education. The Indian Act is but one instrument of the relationship between the Crown and first nations, Inuit and Métis. Inuit do not fall under the Indian Act and therefore have been treated very differently when it comes to programs and policies over the life of Canada.

Indigenous Services Canada provides funding to first nations through interim regional funding formulas and transformative education agreements. While this funding may not have originally stemmed from the recognition of section 35 rights to indigenous education, this funding now contributes to its implementation. The inability of Inuit being able to access similar funds is also a gap that needs to be fixed.

Just as specific funding and self-government education agreements have been necessary measures to meet the Crown's obligations with respect to first nations education, so too are measures needed to meet the Crown's obligations with respect to Inuit education. Canada has now recognized the right to indigenous education in various forums, including section 35 of the Constitution and international instruments. These rights belong to all indigenous peoples of Canada.

As an outcome of the 2009 Inuit Education Accord, which was an agreement between the Government of Canada and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, ITK released the national strategy on Inuit education in 2011. This was guided by a vision to graduate bilingual Inuit children with the skills and knowledge to contribute with pride and confidence in their home communities and in Canada in the 21st century.

This strategy outlined 10 recommendations that should have been undertaken to improve educational outcomes for Inuit, which included strengthening K-to-12 education, investing into post-secondary education, the establishment of a university in Inuit Nunangat and policies to increase the number of Inuit educators.

However, since the signing of the accord and the release of the strategy, there has been little movement on graduation rates for Inuit. Statistics Canada data from 2018 indicate that only 34% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat are graduating with a high school diploma. This is an increase of only 9% from 2009 StatsCan figures. In that same time period, the national graduation rate rose from 75% in 2009 to 86% in 2018.

Major legislative and policy gaps continue to limit access to a quality education for Inuit students. Inuit are one of the fastest-growing populations in this country, and the crisis we still face today in education will only grow if there continues to be a failure to act.

I appreciate that we have done some work in relation to early childhood or post-secondary funding in the last five to seven years, but transformative acts need to happen. Also, the federal government must get over its fear of exerting its jurisdiction and its place within the role of Inuit education moving forward.

Nakurmiik. Thank you.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obed.

We will now proceed with the first round of questions, beginning with Mr. Zimmer for six minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you to all three for appearing at INAN today to talk about education. It's something that's very important to me. I'm a former high school teacher and former varsity coach too, so education is all about coaching to me, and it's about learning. I wouldn't be here today if I didn't have my two degrees and the opportunities that education has given me. It's huge.

I'm going to start with Natan.

I have an article from a while ago, and you've probably read it. It's called "17 little-known facts about Natan Obed". You probably remember it from 2016. I could really relate to one of your passions, and that is listed in number 14. There are a whole bunch. If you want to get to know Mr. Obed a little bit better, just look it up. It's an article in The Hill Times.

There's number 14 especially, on education. The question that was asked of you was, "If you could get the answer to any question, what would it be?" You said: "How do we create an education system across Inuit Nunangat that produces *Inuktitut* /English grade 12 graduates grounded in our culture and ready for any post-secondary program in the world?"

That is a very cool goal. How could you ask for more for the next generation?

You explained a little bit about the macro or the problems or some systemic issues that are maybe still in the system. Give me some examples about how we can get from where it is now, because you brought up the graduation rates. We applaud the ones who have graduated, and that's a real positive, but we want to get better. Maybe explain some of what your vision would look like and what some of the changes would look like if you could implement them today.

• (1745)

Mr. Natan Obed: You never know when things you say in public or to the media will come back to you, so here we are.

I still have that as one of the key foundational goals that I have and the reasons for doing the work I do: empowering Inuit and creating strong, capable Inuit.

The term in Inuktitut for this type of pedagogy is *Inunnguiniq*, which is the creation of strong, capable people who are then ready to be adults in their community and in the world.

It starts with a cultural foundation. It starts with early learning and child care opportunities. Within the K-to-12 system, the pedagogy is often borrowed from jurisdictions like Alberta, especially when you get into grades nine to 12.

There is a natural set-up whereby Inuktitut or Inuktit, broadly across Inuit Nunangat, and also our culture, is set up against the pedagogy and the requirements of K-to-12 education systems that then are prerequisites to go on to anything else.

Often, our educators and those authorities who run our education have had to make really tough decisions about not being aspirational, but just hoping that we can get enough of the prerequisites to allow our students to have transferable degrees.

On the other hand, there are so many social issues, such as food insecurity or lack of housing, that also are tremendous factors in the ability for our students to come to school ready to work.

In our pre-budget submission this year, we have put in a 15-year proposal for a school food program that would allow Inuit students to not have to worry about getting meals and would allow them to be more focused in the classroom and to have more food security in their lives. We do hope that is something the federal government considers.

It is an overarching approach and it needs people in communities who can be leaders in education systems and find their path. It also needs the Canadian government and Canadian institutions to fully accept and recognize indigenous knowledge and indigenous culture and language as adequate prerequisites to then build into the structures that allow for children to then proceed beyond grade 12.

It also requires the funds to be able to bring us into a better position in relation to the rest of the country.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: With that, and you've given a really.... I think there are a lot of conversations around culture being part of the education process.

One thing.... As a former teacher, I've written programs myself. You'd hear, "Well, we've always done it that way, so we're going to keep doing it that way", even though it doesn't really work very well.

I would ask you—based on what you just said, as well—if you think you have enough structure in place. "Structure" is maybe not the right word; it's having the right people and the right sorts of forward-thinking educators in Nunavut to take that challenge, people who are ready to go ahead with this.

Are they just lacking funds or lacking different things, or do you think that this vision for the future has to be established?

Mr. Natan Obed: I believe that there are amazing educators and amazing people in Inuit Nunangat who are striving for the best for their students, from early learning all the way up through to post-secondary.

I think the systemic challenges within in our systems are with the system as a whole. It just isn't comprehensive enough. In many small communities, there are not ways for a student to be able to get all the prerequisites to be able to go on to post-secondary education. There are many of our students who have to then come to the south or come to regional centres just to be able to finish a grade 12 education—no matter how capable they are—in order to start with post-secondary education.

• (1750)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: To get to a regional centre isn't just 10 minutes down the road. It's hours and hours on a plane to get there.

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, it could be within an 800-kilometre or 1,000-kilometre radius where you have a regional centre, versus a centre where there are 300 to 500 people who live in it.

The scaling of this project.... In many cases, Inuit communities didn't provide high school until the 1970s and 1980s. We still have a very new educational system, which is a detriment in some ways, but it is also an opportunity. Things crystallize very quickly in administrative structures, and ways to do business crystallize, but there is still a malleability in our systems.

However, there's ultimately a lack of outcome. I think it's unacceptable, and I think all Canadians should find it unacceptable. I don't think our students are any less bright than any other Canadian students. I think the opportunities to get a quality education and then the opportunities to move to wherever they want to go in the world are the challenges we need to address head-on.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I agree. Well said.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

Ms. Atwin, it's over to you for six minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my committee colleagues. Of course, thank you to our distinguished guests, who are very much regulars. We love to see them.

I want to say to everyone that what I've been looking forward to is this specific study. This is exactly why I got involved in politics to begin with, so I'm very excited for this important conversation that we're having.

I also came from an education background, so it's really great to learn that about you, as well, Mr. Zimmer. I worked specifically with indigenous students in the province of New Brunswick. So many things.... What led me here were the barriers that were being experienced by my students, by the community, by our education directors and by the chiefs. They were constantly being frustrated and feeling unsupported.

Before coming to this place, I did an education study. It took two years. We studied on-reserve education—elementary schools in particular—in comparison to our provincial schools. What I found in the study was that schools that had strong language and culture initiatives had higher attendance rates and higher literacy and numeracy outcomes. The biggest indicator was school food programs—looking after basic needs and ensuring that students had what they needed to be able to function for the day and to be

healthy and whole. School food programs were one of the most important indicators.

The other big piece was representation. It was seeing other indigenous teachers, administrators and education assistants in the rooms with them and being there. That representation is so important.

I know I only have six minutes. I could talk about this for hours. I'm very passionate.

I'll start with President Caron. What are you seeing in your communities as far as that representation is concerned? How is the engagement on language and cultural initiatives, and how do you see that impacting your students?

Ms. Cassidy Caron: At this point, it's not great. The indigenization of the curriculum that is taking place within the provincial governments throughout the Métis nation homeland is actually excluding our Métis governments. They're not engaging with our Métis governments in a meaningful way to actually be able to do this.

Our Métis governments are the rightful representatives of section 35 rights-bearing Métis people, no matter where they live in these provinces. They're the ones who are there to advocate on behalf of these people to change these systems so that the systems are representative for these students.

Unfortunately, we see an easy way out for indigenization of curriculum when a pan-indigenous approach is taken. It often does not reflect Métis-specific culture. The Michif language is not taught in many schools, with the exception of some in Saskatchewan—a language program is taking place there that is just starting to get off the ground— but when we do see those Michif programs taught in the younger years in the early learning and child care programs that our governments are putting in place, we're seeing these children thrive.

We have the programs and supports for the students when they get to post-secondary education, but it's in that middle K-to-12 area that they get left behind. They're learning their language and their culture and they're being engaged in these early learning and child care systems and when they go to university, they also have those same supports, but it's that middle piece that's really being missed.

The engagement we're seeing right now is non-existent. That is why we are advocating investments for our Métis governments to be able to develop these programs and these supports on their own and then put them into the systems to support Métis people.

• (1755)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you very much.

In New Brunswick, we were seeing similar things happening. The provincial government wasn't living up to its responsibilities for provincial schools. There was chronic underfunding for on-reserve schools. Something that worked very well was that specific agreements were put in place. We saw major dividends from those agreements in empowering the communities to make decisions for themselves to hire and to put people in the schools, which is that representation piece.

President Obed, you mentioned some of the transformative education agreements. Can you speak to how important they are and what they look like in your territory?

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll start with the work that we've tried to do with the federal government.

Starting in 2008 or so, when Inuit wanted to create a national Inuit strategy on education, we brought the federal government and the provinces, territories and all education authorities together to try to come up with terms of reference or a path forward for improving educational outcomes for K-to-12 Inuit students and also for post-secondary students.

The accord that was signed was meant to be a starting point. We were so excited for the possibility of further federal funding for specific targeted interventions that would be very much appreciated by educational authorities. They were Inuit-specific and allowed for culture and language, for greater access to social programs, or for specific accreditation standards, especially when it came to teacher attainment and accreditation. These interventions would bring more Inuit into the school program or into post-secondary education. We built our national strategy around this idea that we could transform the system and that all jurisdictions would be with us.

Ultimately, people retreat back into the status quo. It's very easy to do that.

Also, I can understand how hard it is for a federal government to get into a space that a province or territory has deemed its own, even if it does not do a very good job with it. If you look at our educational attainment and you look at the infrastructure in our communities for education in relation to other communities, it's obvious that there's a massive deficit, but transforming that space and allowing any partner who wants to help is not necessarily what we have experienced.

We still remain hopeful, and, through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, we do have a structure whereby education and early learning are priorities within the bilateral space between Inuit leadership and the Crown. However, we are still struggling with that basic idea of what is possible and the extent to which the federal government is willing to put itself in a difficult scenario for Inuit children.

This question is not just in education. It's also in relation to housing. It's also in relation to the implementation of UNDRIP. These are really hard spaces for the federal government, because they bleed into relationships with jurisdictions that in some cases will go hard in other areas if they do not like what the federal government is doing in relation to this area of indigenous people.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Gill, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

I, too, come from the world of education—that seems to be a pattern today—more specifically, from the world of college education, in Quebec. I used to teach literature. I am therefore very sensitive to what Ms. Caron and Mr. Obed have said.

I have actually taught elements of culture and language, particularly to aboriginal students in my riding, namely Innu students. So I was able to see, for several years, the difficulties that the students were facing. They understood the language, but sometimes we tried to go very far in teaching literary works in French.

Mr. Obed talked about the difficulties on top of that, and I have seen them too. Quebec students who are not members of a first nation also have difficulties, but these are not necessarily related to remoteness, for example. As Mr. Obed mentioned, we want these students to be able to study at home, and that is sometimes very far away. Some of the students I taught lived more than 800 kilometres from the college.

I would like Ms. Caron and Mr. Obed to tell us how this affects other areas. One of the things they mentioned was housing. I am not going to raise the topic of jurisdictions, which is quite unusual for the Bloc Québécois, because I am speaking generally. There are children who go to school far from home. There is also the issue of cultural references.

I will now turn the floor over to the witnesses about the external needs that make us want to do better.

I would have liked to tell you about Kiuna College in Quebec, but I will come back to that later.

● (1800)

[*English*]

The Chair: I would suggest that Ms. Caron start, and then Mr. Obed could respond.

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Sure. If I understood correctly, the question was simply about what more could be done to do better.

I think it comes down to simple investments in education for indigenous students and for Métis students.

We have always seen significant underfunding for Métis programs and services. There's been that jurisdictional hot potato between provincial governments and the federal government for so long with regard to who takes responsibility for the Métis.

We need to understand. I have been in education in English all my life. Natan said that in their own homes they speak Inuktitut. I can retain it if I speak it at home, but we also know that because I went to an English school all my life, up to grade 12 and twice in university, all that I learned was in English.

When I speak my mother tongue, I am happy. Many people, many Inuit.... I know I am not a fluent Inuktitut speaker because it hasn't been taught. I want to know whether education will also think of our young people who will not grow up in the educational system like us.

I am happy that I was able to be educated in English, but I had to leave my culture. I don't know how to sew traditional clothes. I do not know how to prepare sealskins or light a qulliq. I could have learned those life skills if I had learned my mother tongue. I want to learn them. I want to learn what I was supposed to learn in my mother tongue.

I encourage young people who are going to school now and who are working with indigenous people and other Canadians.... I would like to see that we have an option in Canada to learn two languages of our choice. Cassidy and Natan can respond.

The truth and reconciliation recommendations from 62 to 65, encourage all governments—federal, provincial, territorial and local governments—on how they can be more supportive. Why is it that none of those recommendations are being implemented, especially those recommendations from 62 to 65?

Thank you.

[English]

• (1810)

The Chair: Should we start with Ms. Caron, and then go to Mr. Obed?

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Sure. Thank you.

It's great to see you, Lori.

I know many of the truth and reconciliation calls to action, but I don't know the specific numbers around them.

Lori, are those specifically around education?

Ms. Lori Idlout: [Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:]

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[Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:]

Yes, they're regarding education. These are recommendations to improve education for indigenous people to learn their culture and their language. Funding should be a resource to make it happen.

[English]

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Thank you.

I can only imagine that the challenges once again come down to whose jurisdiction is implementing these recommendations—if it is on the provincial government to implement these within their edu-

cational systems, or if it is upon the federal government to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action.

Once again, we aren't seeing throughout the Métis nation the implementation of Métis-specific programs within the education system. There's just simply no uptake outside of our own educational authorities or, as I said, in the early learning and child care programs that our Métis governments are delivering on their own. We struggle to have that recognition within the provincial governments right now, and we will continue to see that.

That pan-indigenous approach to this, though, just does not work for our children. It is teaching Métis students different ways of knowing that aren't coming from our own communities. I think I'll leave it at that. It's that jurisdictional challenge that we continue to face.

However, in our Métis governments, we have the ability to develop these programs and these services for our children. While we don't have the ability to learn the Michif language in the provincial education system, our Métis governments have the resources to be able to do that.

Lori, as you said, you didn't have an education in your own language, but you could go home and you could speak it there. Our focus is on these early learning and child care centres, where these young people are learning their language at a really young age and then giving the parents the resources to continue that at home, because we do know that this gap is going to exist once they enter kindergarten and on into the ongoing years.

Again, on the resources, to be able to do that from our Métis governments and to be able to deliver it into our families is our best bet right now to do this in a good way.

Mr. Natan Obed: Specifically in relation to the calls to action, there are a number of things that we had hoped to do with Canadian educators and in Canadian educational systems to ensure that there was a distinctions-based approach to the way in which curricula are developed. Unfortunately, jurisdictions aren't very good at going to rights holders all the time. Often, if there's an individual whom they know, perhaps, and who then will happily take that space, curricula are developed with an individual perspective about our peoples, rather than an official perspective from representatives of first nations, Inuit and Métis.

That is not necessarily about children growing up in our communities, but it is about the way Canadians perceive the residential school experience and also the way in which Canadians understand Inuit, first nations and Métis realities.

When it comes to the funding of an education system and specifically to provide more funding and to be more open to increasing educational outcomes and attainments, we still are in that phase of building towards investments and ambitions.

Again, I'll go back to our educational attainment rights. We are over 50% lower in graduating our young students from grade 12 than other Canadians. It is unacceptable, and we need to figure out how to solve this. Yes, this committee conversation is great, but certainly it is a crisis within this country, and there are very strong pedagogical ways in which we can improve existing systems that categorically would give our students a better chance to succeed.

There aren't these mystical problems that we have no solutions for. Give students food to eat. Give them the courses they need to graduate. Allow for culture and language within the curriculum and celebrate that. Allow for that to be the foundation under which they can go out into the rest of the country and pursue further educational attainment. Provide the educational program in our mother tongue. It's not hard, but somehow we've made it impossible.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We have about 10 minutes left, so I'm going to suggest three minutes, three minutes, two minutes and two minutes for the first four.

We'll start with Mr. Melillo for three minutes.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my fellow committee members and of course to our witnesses, whom we know very well. I really appreciate the conversation we've had today, and you've given us a lot to think about already. I really appreciate it.

I'll start with President Caron, but President Obed, if you want to jump in at any point, please do.

I really appreciate, President, that you talked about the barriers that exist, the low graduation rates, the lower scores for Métis students, but you also spoke about the need for a broader structure to particularly support some more culturally appropriate education. That really struck home for me.

I represent northwestern Ontario, part of the Métis homeland, and also 42 first nations across three treaty territories. I think a lot of people in my region, when they talk about indigenous education, they think about education on reserve, and that's it. Obviously, education on reserve is very important, but I would agree with you that there is a need for greater support in the provincial and the public systems, as you mentioned. We've started to see that in my riding as well, where Ojibwa is now being taught as a second language, for example. That is something that is relatively new that started when I was still in school.

I'm going to stop there because I'm going to eat up all of my time, but I want to hear from you, President Caron. Could you speak more specifically on some of the cultural aspects that you feel should be included that will make a difference for Métis people in order to advance that education in the public school system?

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Honestly, it's as simple as the recognition that there are three distinct indigenous peoples in this country. There are still a lot of Métis students whose parents don't identify them in these systems because then they will be taught somebody else's culture.

The ability for educators to know that there are three distinct indigenous peoples and that we have our own cultures, languages, histories and stories.... That recognition matters. It starts as simply as that. Then to be able to have educators understand that there are unique resources for Métis students, that there are Michif resources for the language of the Métis people.... It's not the only language. Métis people speak Cree, Dene and many different dialects of the Michif language. To know the stories of the Métis nation, where we come from, who we are, why we are so proud to be who we are—those things matter.

It's fantastic to be able to learn about other people's cultures, of course, and that's really important, especially if you are in a neighbouring first nations community and your colleagues and classmates are coming from different cultures. It's important to learn about that, but it's also important for that Métis student to also feel like they are being honoured, that they can be proud of who they are and that they can be proud to teach their classmates about who they are. When their teacher knows who they are and where they come from and the language that they speak, those things are just so important.

That distinctions-based recognition seems so simple, but it's just not there.

• (1820)

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Melillo.

Now we'll go to Mr. McLeod. Mr. McLeod, you will have three minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the presenters.

Education is a big part of our discussions whenever we talk about self-determination and self-governance. Many of our nations here in the north have focused a lot on post-secondary investment so that they can provide some support, whether it's tutors or just being able to adjust to living in the south.

The results that we're hearing, or the feedback that we're getting, is that this isn't good enough in terms of providing support for people to just get to that point. We need to look at complete wraparound support, right from the time a girl is going to have a baby, especially if there's no family around—no grandmother or somebody to advise her on making healthy choices. We could have babies who are born without being affected by FAS, FAE or other issues, because there's no program that can fix that. Education starts very early, right from the time the mother is expecting a child.

Can both of you tell me a little bit of how you see that as we talk about education in terms of having good outcomes?

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Caron, and then Mr. Obed.

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Thank you. I couldn't agree more. When I say that the Métis nation looks at education as a lifelong pursuit, we really do mean that it starts from birth—being able to provide parents with the ability to raise this child in a good way, in a good home; and giving that person everything they need to be able to then go into the early learning and child care programs that we are able to deliver.

Children need support all throughout their life to be able to get to post-secondary education. As I said, with the investments we have seen through the Métis nation right now, we have early learning and child care and we have post-secondary education. How do we expect these children to carry on what they have picked up in these early learning and child care centres and then kind of make their way through K to 12 and be as successful as they were as little children and make it into post-secondary? We need continuous support for children to get to the post-secondary level.

From there, of course, what's next? It's about the different employment opportunities that will still be part of the Métis nation. Specifically in our case, it's about how we create jobs that will contribute to the Métis economy.

We're thinking about this lifelong journey of a Métis person from birth up until death. You're right that it takes wraparound supports, but it takes that continuous thinking around how we make sure somebody has everything they need to be successful right from birth until death. Right now, for the Métis nation, the glaring gap is within the K-to-12 education system.

Mr. Natan Obed: At ITK we've worked quite hard on early learning and child care. We released a framework in 2018. We will share that with the committee members. We'll also be sharing our national Inuit strategy on education.

To your point, though, Michael, in the space of early learning, as so many people from our culture have said, children need to be safe. Children need to be loved. Children need to be connected to their language and culture. That is the foundation that then allows the children to go into the world and experience and learn in the world in the healthiest and most productive way.

We still have a long way to go to ensure, as somebody said earlier, that there are those wraparound services to ensure that guardians and parents and whoever is in that circle of care for a young child have the ability to pave that path for that child and to have those three things—to be safe, to be loved and to be connected to their family and their community.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obed.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier, I mentioned the example of Kiuna College, located in Odanak, Quebec, in an Abenaki aboriginal community. This college caters to aboriginal youth...

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'm so sorry. The English interpretation is not coming through.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will take a short break, because there is a problem with the interpretation.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout, are you not hearing it in English?

Ms. Lori Idlout: No. I'm sorry. That was my own fault. I had to switch it to original when I was speaking and I forgot to put it back to English.

The Chair: Okay. No problem.

[*Translation*]

Please continue, Mrs. Gill.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, I mentioned a college located in an aboriginal community, which I think is a good example in Quebec. This college is for aboriginal people who are doing higher education.

I would like more details on this. It would help the committee members in their study.

Mr. Obed, Ms. Caron, do you have any examples of what can be done?

There was talk of funding shortfalls particularly for the Métis Nation, and a number of other issues.

Do you have any examples of programs that are working well not only in your region and in your own communities, but also internationally, where there are other indigenous nations?

I would like to hear your comments on this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would you like to start, Ms. Caron?

Ms. Cassidy Caron: Yes.

We do have higher education learning institutions that are Métis-specific. They're not necessarily post-secondary institutions, but they are higher education learning institutions that are Métis-specific.

For example, in Saskatchewan we have the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is Métis-run. They develop and deliver Métis-specific learning tools and a bunch of different programs and services. In the province of Alberta, we have the Rupertsland Institute as well. Those are really great examples of Métis-specific learning institutions that I think this committee should absolutely take a look at.

They're doing some really incredible things. I love the opportunity to go and visit those institutions and learn more myself. I would highly recommend having a look at Rupertsland Institute and the Gabriel Dumont Institute.

The Chair: Thank you.

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