

## The Future of the Post Secondary Student Support Program – Issue paper

**Executive Summary:** *A recent widely circulated petition has energized discussion about the future of the Post Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). PSSSP has been capped since 1989 and the future of the PSSSP has been under formal government review for at least seven years.*

*In this period, the number of eligible Six Nations post secondary students consistently and significantly increased. Post secondary costs (tuition in particular) consistently and significantly increased. PSSSP funding did not increase proportionately over the past twenty years.*

*Now, after twenty years, the net result of the cap and review process is alarmingly clear. In spite of the fact that Six Nations makes every effort to stretch available funds to all reasonable limits, each year over 200 eligible Six Nations post secondary students do not receive any PSSSP funding. Each year, more students are forced into other sources of funding.*

*The federal strategic policy direction is to accelerate this trend by offering a new Consolidated Student Grant through the Canada Student Loans Program. The bursary will provide \$250 each month in grants for students from low-income families and \$100 a month for students from middle-income families. The new grant will be paid through all years of a university undergraduate, college or trade school program.*

*Engaging First Nations students in mainstream financial aid significantly removes post secondary funding from the on-going matters of a federal fiduciary, entitlement of First Nations to resources and further undermines First Nation capacity building.*

*Immediate intervention in this policy direction is required. Had the funds assigned for the Consolidated Student Grant gone to PSSSP for eligible Six Nations students then 2007/2008 funding for Six Nations students would increase by \$936,562. There is no reason why these "available" funds should not be directed to Six Nations where post secondary needs and accountability has been clearly established.*

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By now many people in “Indian country” have received the e mailed petition from FNEC<sup>1</sup> about the possible loss or transfer of the PSSSP.

There are grounds for serious concern for the future of Post Secondary Student Support Program. Is the end of PSSSP funding imminent? Will it end April 2009? Indications are that the threat is longer term but none the less real.

Key messages from INAC over the last several years, including the attempted review and evaluation of PSSSP indicate that the federal strategic policy direction is to make what is presented as a “problem” - go away. What is the problem? In a nut shell, it is an issue of accountability and it depends on who you speak to whether the lack of accountability rests with INAC or First Nations.

It is not only post secondary education that is at risk. For elementary and secondary education, the basic INAC position is that First Nations education is beyond repair. Rather than address the fact that First Nations education has been under funded and under resourced for 20 years<sup>2</sup> (generations really), the federal government would prefer to make the problem go away.

For post secondary, INAC continues to hold the position that PSSSP funding will not be increased even when needs have been well documented over many years<sup>3</sup>. It is ironic that funding and resources continue to be available for research that is consistent with strategic government policy direction but realistic increases to PSSSP are not forthcoming.

We are seeing research recommending that First Nations school authorities partner with provincial school boards. This is supported by research which concludes that the key way to get more Aboriginal PSE graduates is to get more Aboriginal high school graduates<sup>4</sup>. Then there is the research into

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<sup>1</sup> Petition to the Canadian Parliament concerning the right of First Nations to Post-Secondary Education, [http://www.cepn-fnec.com/index\\_e.aspx](http://www.cepn-fnec.com/index_e.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> The PSSSP was capped in 1989 with minimal annual increases to the First Nation level.

<sup>3</sup> See Unfunded data and trends in GRPSEO Annual Reports at [www.grpseo.org](http://www.grpseo.org).

<sup>4</sup> Mendelson, Michael, Aboriginal Peoples and Post Secondary Education in Canada, June 2006, The Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

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Factors Affecting the Use of Financial Student Assistance by First Nations Youth<sup>5</sup> that among other observations alarmingly implies PSSSP funding is a “barrier” to First Nations use of mainstream financial student assistance. As we consider the future of the PSSSP, it is important to note one significant recommendation in this report - to provide access and support to “other” scholarships and bursaries.

More significantly, now, we have been advised that a major amount of funding will be going into mainstream student aid with no comparable major increase to PSSSP.

So what is new? A new, consolidated Canada Student Grant will be available to students in the fall 2009. The new program will provide \$250 each month in grants for students from low-income families and \$100 a month for students from middle-income families. The new grant will be paid through all years of a university undergraduate, college or trade school program.<sup>6</sup>

With PSSSP funds stretched to the maximum, this “new” alternate access to funding is clearly designed to “attract” First Nation students to mainstream student financial aid systems.

The “mainstream-national” research focus is based on the premise of increasing Aboriginal access, participation and completion of post secondary education. The research, for the most part, sounds innocuous but totally avoids the historical and cultural basis upon which First Nations people live in this land. The research therefore often supports erroneous and illogical

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<sup>5</sup> Factors Affecting the use of Financial Assistance by First Nations Youth, Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd and Dr Blair Stonechild, June 2008.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.canlearn.ca/eng/main/spotlighton/bdg2008/csg.shtml>, A new, consolidated Canada Student Grant will be available to students in fall 2009. Before, the Government of Canada offered many different small grants. Now, all federal grants will be combined to provide more effective support for students and to better assist Canadian families who struggle with the cost of higher education. The new grant will be paid through all years of a university undergraduate, college or trade school program. Students from low- and middle-income families will qualify based on clearly defined income levels. The new program will provide \$250 each month in grants for students from low-income families and \$100 a month for students from middle-income families.

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conclusions that First Nation PSE student issues can be dealt with by treating them like all other PSE students through mainstream institutions and systems.

Engaging First Nations students in mainstream financial aid significantly removes post secondary funding from the on-going matters of a federal fiduciary and entitlement of First Nations to resources and further undermines First Nation capacity building.

The INAC strategy to for PSSSP is obvious. The “make the problem go away solution” involves discrediting and undermining First Nations administration of the PSSSP by:

- failing to increase funding to the PSSSP for First Nation (local delivery),
- continuing to generically challenge the transparency and accountability of PSSSP First Nation administration, while building the “assimilation” strategy through research and
- increasing student aid through mainstream institutions and programs.

For Six Nations, the facts are clear. Six Nations has demonstrated PSSSP accountability very clearly yet funding is not increased proportionate to rising costs and the number of eligible students. The results for Six Nations are two fold but equally significant: many students remain under funded and many are not funded at all<sup>7</sup>.

Many Six Nations students are already accessing student financial aid given the funding levels available through the GRPSEO (particularly limited education allowance and funding for books). When a student applies through OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) this is linked with the CSLP (Canada Student Loans Program).

Six Nations has outstanding significant claims to land and resources. Accessing these resources has become complex if not impossible. In the

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<sup>7</sup> See the unfunded student data in Grand River Post Secondary Annual Reports at [www.grpseo.org](http://www.grpseo.org)

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interim First Nations are on the brink of sliding into national post secondary policy irrelevance.

For the 2007/2008 fiscal year, the Grand River Post Secondary Education Office issued 3,746.25 months of education allowance. The equivalent Consolidated Student Grant amount is \$936,562 (months X \$250 per month grant). For 2006/2007, the Grand River Post Secondary Education Office issued 3532.16 months of education. The equivalent Consolidated Student Grant amount is \$883,040<sup>8</sup>.

### **Considerations for Next Steps:**

Immediate intervention in the strategic federal policy direction is required.

Had the funds assigned for the Consolidated Student Grant gone to PSSSP for eligible Six Nations students then funding for Six Nations students would increase by \$936,562 in 2007-2008.

There is no reason why these “available” funds should not be directed to Six Nations where post secondary needs and accountability have been clearly established.

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<sup>8</sup> Annual Report 2007-2008, Grand River Post Secondary Education Office, see [www.grpseo.org](http://www.grpseo.org)

### **A Chronology of recent events of significance:**

July 2008: AFN Emergency Resolution re: PSE. (received at the GRPSEO Nov 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008!) There are three elements to this resolution.

1. Chiefs-in-Assembly to make federal, provincial and territorial governments aware of the federal fiduciary responsibilities for First Nations Post-Secondary Education.
2. Chiefs-in-Assembly to pursue corrections from the Minister of Indian Affairs concerning the damaging misinformation regarding First Nations Governments management of post-secondary education programs.
3. The Chiefs-in-Assembly mandate the AFN to engage with the Minister of Indian Affairs and First Nations to improve PSSSP and the core funding of First Nations Institutes of Higher learning by:
  - Increasing the funding to First Nations PSSSP programs locally based on need;
  - Funding First Nations and the AFN to establish centralized data collection and performance management systems for post-secondary education to ensure best value for money; and
  - Improve the accountability of INAC to First Nations regarding the PSSSP.

Sep 10 2008: Ontario announced a \$150 Textbook and Technology grant to full time students attending eligible post secondary institutions this year.

Oct 29, 2008: AFN issued an urgent call to First Nations educators to submit evidence of funding needs of elementary and secondary education. This information is to be the focus of the Special Chiefs Assembly in December in Ottawa. The agenda however now shows a one hour panel discussion on "Reciprocal Accountability" involving considerable post secondary focus with

- Michael Mendelson, Caledon Institute of Social Policy<sup>9</sup>,
- John Richards, Simon Fraser University,

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<sup>9</sup> Mendelson, Michael, Aboriginal Peoples and Post Secondary Education in Canada, June 2006, The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. Key message: if there are to be more Aboriginal PSE graduates, there must be more Aboriginal high school graduates.

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- Tim Thompson, First Nations Technical Institute<sup>10</sup>,
- Chief Gilbert Whiteduck, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg<sup>11</sup>( originating community of the on line fall 2008 PSE petition).

Nov 2008: Received an emailed petition re: rumoured transfer of PSSSP to CSLP or third party from the FNEC (Quebec)<sup>12</sup>.

November 2008: CSLP announced a \$250 monthly bursary to students in need beginning in the fall of 2009<sup>13</sup>. This strategy may attract increasing numbers of First Nation PSE students to the Canada Student Loans Program.

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<sup>10</sup>First Nation Technical Institute remained open in 2008/2009 with federal and provincial governments providing just over \$2 million to keep its doors open. The school was caught in a jurisdictional dispute between both levels of government. INAC provided just over \$500 thousand.

<sup>11</sup> Petition to the Canadian Parliament concerning the right of First Nations to Post-Secondary Education, [http://www.cepn-fnec.com/index\\_e.aspx](http://www.cepn-fnec.com/index_e.aspx)

<sup>12</sup> The First Nations Education Council (FNEC) was created in April 1985. The association brings together 22 Native communities from the province of Quebec, representing eight different Nations: Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Huron, Malecite, Micmac, Mohawk and Innu.

The FNEC is associated with the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, which is comprised of all the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Chiefs. The FNEC implements the mandates it receives from its General Assembly, represented by one education representative per member community, and its Special General Assembly, which includes the Chiefs of the member communities. These mandates aim at making it possible for member communities to dispense quality education to all children, with respect for the distinctive cultural, political, demographic, economic and social features of each community.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.canlearn.ca/eng/main/spotlighton/bdg2008/csg.shtml>, A new, consolidated Canada Student Grant will be available to students in fall 2009. Before, the Government of Canada offered many different small grants. Now, all federal grants will be combined to provide more effective support for students and to better assist Canadian families who struggle with the cost of higher education. The new grant will be paid through all years of a university undergraduate, college or trade school program. Students from low- and middle-income families will qualify based on clearly defined income levels. The new program will provide \$250 each month in grants for students from low-income families and \$100 a month for students from middle-income families.

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November 2008: The e mail petition and information to date was discussed by the GRPSE Board. The decision was for individual board and staff members and staff to participate in the petition. The Director will continue to monitor activity.

December 1, 2008: Issue Paper prepared by the GRPSEO Director for submission to the Council rep on the GRPSEO Board and the elected Chief's office. Issue paper also prepared for community circulation.

GRPSEO