FINAL REPORT of the

POVERTY and EDUCATION TASK FORCE

February 2023

Manitoba

Treaty and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Manitoba is on Treaty 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 Territories and the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Ininiwak, and Nehethowuk Peoples. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

We respect the spirit and intent of the Treaties and Treaty Making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

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And last but not least, sincere appreciation to the 2000 students, school staff, and community members who took the time to participate in the engagement sessions and high school student survey. Hearing the voices of those who are most directly affected by poverty was the most valuable part of this work.

Cover art by Makayla. Used with permission of OMAZINIBII'IGEG: Indigenous Artist Collective at Children of the Earth High School.

* Other members originally identified were not able to participate or had minimal participation on the task force.

Letter on Behalf of the Poverty and Education Task Force

February 2023

To The Honourable Minister Wayne Ewasko,

It is our pleasure to present you with the **Final Report of the Poverty and Education Task Force**. Through targeted community engagement with over 2000 Manitobans, the voices and experiences of people who live in and with poverty, along with those who work daily to improve the systems that provide support, have greatly informed the content on the pages you are about to read.

An accompanying Consultant Report provides additional details on the targeted engagement between April and August 2022, including the results of the high school survey and findings from a series of in-person sessions with students and virtual stakeholder sessions. The engagements that took place beyond the consultants' time period are embedded as part of this final report.

The Poverty and Education Task Force members met over the course of the past year to design an approach to engagement, to review the findings from the engagement, and to put forward recommendations and actionable strategies to reduce the impact of poverty on education for Manitoba students.

In the words of Professor Paul Gorski, equity and justice educator, we must "fix injustice, not kids." You will find this philosophy embedded throughout the report and recommendations presented. We recognize that we are not the first group to have reported on poverty and education in Manitoba; however, we do believe that the recommendations will make a meaningful difference in the lives of the students, families, and communities we serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring together the provincial Poverty and Education Task Force and for your commitment to move forward with the recommendations.

Sincerely,

Jackie Connell Project Lead	Dilly Knol Co-chair	Dana Rudy Co-chair

Executive Summary

The creation of the provincial Task Force on Poverty and Education was one of the recommendations in the final report of the Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education, and it was a commitment made in Manitoba's K to 12 Action Plan.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning launched the task force in the fall of 2021. The key responsibilities were to examine the impact of poverty on education and to put forth recommendations and actionable strategies with an initial focus on

- food access and security
- access to technology, transportation, and other socio-economic barriers to participation
- outcomes and continuity of education for children in care

The task force was made up of diverse members representing students, parents, teachers, school leaders, stakeholder organizations, community groups, the City of Winnipeg, and the Manitoba government.

This final report builds upon a series of engagements undertaken across Manitoba by Boivin Communication Group Inc. and the project team between March and November 2022. This included secondary research, a provincial high school survey, as well as targeted in-person, community-based sessions with youth and virtual stakeholder sessions.

The recommendations of the report are organized by the following themes:

1. **Food Security and Nutrition:** Enhance food security and increase access to nutritious food for students living in poverty.

2. **Mental Health:** Support the mental health and well-being of students living in poverty.

3. **Racism and Discrimination:** Ensure a culturally safe, anti-racist, and inclusive learning environment for students living in poverty.

4. **Transportation:** Enhance transportation accessibility for students living in poverty.

5. **Technology:** Support digital equity through accessibility for students living in poverty.

6. **Supports for Indigenous Students:** Ensure an Indigenous-inclusive education system that is reflected across the curriculum, programming, policy, and education workforce.

7. **Supports for Children in Care:** Enhance the well-being of children in care who live in poverty, including a focus on ensuring service coordination and cultural supports.

8. **Intersectoral/Holistic Approach:** Provide holistic services and supports for students living in poverty.

9. **Equity in Education:** Apply an equity lens to planning at the school, division, and provincial levels.

All education partners and stakeholders are asked to review this report and examine opportunities to implement strategies at the classroom, school, organizational, and community levels to reduce the impacts of poverty on education. This report will be shared and acted upon by all stakeholders, education partners, relevant government bodies, as well as the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, as specified in the Terms of Reference.

Summary of Recommendations

1. **Recommendation:** Enhance food security and increase access to nutritious food for students living in poverty.

- Review in-school meal programs and partnerships to improve access and ensure equitable distribution of funding and resources.
  - Prioritize students living in poverty and schools/communities experiencing high poverty.
  - Prioritize student voices in food security solutions (e.g., include student voices as part of divisional/school programming and decision making around nutrition).
- Provide students and families with access to community gardens and kitchen-related spaces in schools for meal planning and preparation, especially in communities experiencing high poverty.
- Pursue public and private partnerships to support and enhance school and community-based nutrition programming, including access to nutrition outside of school hours.
- Review and revise the *Healthy Food in Schools* website, existing guidelines, and policy documents to ensure Indigenous values on food, diet, and health are reflected.
- Revise existing Manitoba K to 12 curriculum (i.e., physical education, health, human ecology, and vocational education) to include learnings about Indigenous teachings and worldviews, food sovereignty, meal planning, and long-term food security. This process should include working together with diverse partners and stakeholders.
- Expand horticulture programming across Manitoba schools by ensuring flexibility within course offerings. This should provide more flexibility in curriculum for credit attainment in areas such as gardening, aquaponics, and food sovereignty.

2. **Recommendation:** Support the mental health and well-being of students living in poverty.

- Provide improved access to culturally safe mental health supports and trauma-informed practices. This includes the redistribution of existing funding and staffing to provide easily accessible, barrier-free access to students living in poverty in school.
  - Consider various methods for students to access culturally safe mental health services (e.g., in person, online, telephone) to ensure accessibility across Winnipeg and rural and northern communities.
  - Pursue targeted programs, such as the Indigenous wellness program Kids Help Phone: Brighter Days (online module-based training for Indigenous youth).

- Ensure equity in decision making in the allocation and distribution of clinical support services, with increased supports given to schools with low socio-economic indicators.
- Prioritize clinical services in the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning workforce planning strategy.
- Continue funding mental health projects in schools through Manitoba's Teachers' Idea Fund, prioritizing equity-based initiatives.
- Build mental health and wellness into the provincial curriculum and professional development for all education staff and school leaders, especially in communities with high poverty.
- Continue to authentically involve Elders and Knowledge Keepers in schools to provide students with culturally appropriate and safe supports.

3. **Recommendation:** Ensure a culturally safe, anti-racist, and inclusive learning environment for students living in poverty.

- Ensure supports and services are provided in a way that protects the dignity of students living in poverty (e.g., distribution practices that are needs-based, accessible, barrier-free, inclusive, safe, and non-stigmatizing).
- Create hiring and retention practices and policies to increase and ensure school staff are inclusive of equity-deserving groups. Teachers of Indigenous languages, formally credentialed or not, should be considered. Recommendations made in the *State of Equity in Education Report* by the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle should support decision making.
- Develop and provide mandatory professional learning for all staff on communication, cultural safety, anti-racism, and inclusive educational practices. Consider partnerships among government, school divisions, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and community organizations.
- Review existing curriculum for opportunities to include instruction on the topic of poverty, its consequences, and its root causes in order to create an empathic environment, expand awareness, and reduce stigmatization.
- Develop and implement a provincial anti-racism policy for all school divisions as a means of providing additional pathways to students living in poverty to report and reduce incidents of racism and discrimination. This includes strengthening anti-racism content in curriculum for all grades.
- Continue to implement *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—Manitoba's Indigenous Education Policy Framework* province-wide.
- Continue to collect information about the school experiences of students living in poverty to better understand and address concerns related to racism and discrimination. This could be collected through an annual K to 12 provincial census (e.g., Ontario, Alberta).

4. **Recommendation:** Enhance transportation accessibility for students living in poverty.

- Review and modify *The Public Schools Act* (PSA) to ensure policies offer barrier-free transportation services to all students living in poverty. This includes revisiting transportation distance requirements (1.6 km) to allow for increased flexibility for students living in poverty. (Currently, the transportation section of *The Public Schools Act* mentions other sub-groups, such as youth with additional needs, but does not include students living in poverty.)
- Consider alternative modes of transportation in rural and northern communities due to a lack of public transportation options and extreme weather conditions.
- Pursue public and private partnerships to offer free bus passes to all students living in poverty in communities where public transit is available. This includes partnerships with all levels of government (e.g., Department of Families [Employment and Income Assistance] and the City of Winnipeg and Brandon).

5. **Recommendation:** Support digital equity through accessibility for students living in poverty.

- Allocate equitable funding for devices for students living in poverty. This may include increasing the capacity of computer loan programs and providing students living in poverty with after-school technology user support, including troubleshooting and repairs.
- Reduce risks associated with expanded access to devices, including exploitation and abuse, by
  - involving students and educating them about the risks
  - notifying caregivers
  - updating privacy and safety settings
  - reviewing content
  - recognizing signs of abuse

  Consideration should be given to partnerships with community organizations and the role they play in ensuring the safe use of technology for students outside of school hours.
- Partner with service providers to expand affordable Internet access in rural and northern Manitoba. A focus should be placed on partnering with service providers to provide free/low-cost Internet access in schools experiencing greater poverty.
- Promote existing programs to expand access to Internet connections, including the following:
  - Government of Canada *Connecting Families* program, which is designed to reduce fees for Internet connection to families with low-incomes
  - Universal Broadband Fund, which was developed as part of the federal *High Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy*

6. **Recommendation:** Ensure an Indigenous-inclusive education system that is reflected across the curriculum, programming, policy, and education workforce.

- Prioritize recruitment and retention efforts to increase the number of Indigenous teachers and teachers of Indigenous languages. This should include partnerships and planning with post-secondary institutions.
- Expand initiatives that support traditional Indigenous knowledge systems for Indigenous youth, such as
  - Indigenous Graduation Coach programs
  - cultural advisors
  - Indigenous language immersion programs (K to 12)
- Develop additional curriculum and credit options (K–12) prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing, and learning, including ceremony. This includes treaty education and land-based education, as reflected in the *Indigenous Education Policy Framework*. At the high school level, these courses should be implemented for credit.
- Establish mobility agreements and partner with First Nations communities to develop a single provincial student information system to support Indigenous students in receiving a high-quality education wherever they attend school.
- Continue to support and fund the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative to ensure adequate funding and longevity of the initiative.
- Develop an approach to implement Indigenous languages courses (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) for high school credit in collaboration with the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy (MALS) group.
- Continue to report on four- and six-year graduation rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the annual report, as this reinforces multiple pathways for success. Data should be used to inform school-level planning and equitable resource allocation.

7. **Recommendation:** Enhance the well-being of children in care who live in poverty, including a focus on ensuring service coordination and cultural supports.

- Ensure children in care have barrier-free access to the resources they need to attend and be successful in school, using the child-first approach reflected in Jordan's Principle.
- Improve information sharing and communication among Child and Family Services (CFS), agencies, social workers, Indigenous governing bodies, and school divisions. The development of a provincial student information system will support this (currently underway).
- Provide access to school community and family rooms for family visits to support the reunification of children in care.

- Revise policy to support children in care through the "one school, one year" model, regardless of what supports are being received (including transportation).
- Implement children-in-care liaisons or outreach workers to bridge a gap between home and school.
- Increase awareness of the tuition waiver program in Manitoba through the creation of a centralized website for resources available to students in care (using https://agedout.com as a notable example).
- Explore further development of cultural supports and opportunities specific to Indigenous children in care in connection with the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative.

8. **Recommendation:** Provide holistic services and supports for students living in poverty.

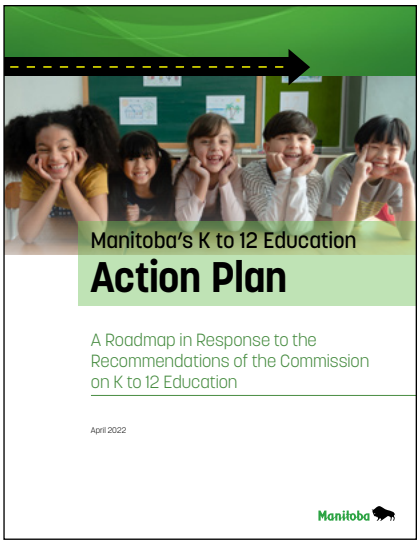
- Explore partnerships among government, school divisions, and community organizations to ensure the accessibility of services for students living in poverty.
  - One model for exploration could be schools as community hubs. This would require a conceptual framework, policies, and guidelines.
  - Increase health services and resources for students living in poverty through collaboration among government, school divisions, and community organizations (e.g., WRHA, NRHA, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Manitoba Housing, and more).
- Provide high-quality education through interdepartmental collaboration for youth who are incarcerated.
- Continue to develop and implement the provincial attendance strategy and policy framework.
  - Consider parent-student outreach coordinators/liaisons for students who attend schools and live in communities experiencing high poverty.
  - Cease the use of withdrawal as a response to poor attendance.
  - Ensure ongoing school programming for students who are experiencing barriers to attendance.
- Expand the Community Schools Program to include additional schools within high-poverty communities.

9. **Recommendation:** Apply an equity lens to planning at the school, division, and provincial levels.

- Government and school divisions support a shared understanding of equity, as developed by stakeholders and the community. This shared definition should affect decision making at all levels (e.g., funding, policy, priorities).
- Explore an Education Equity Impact Assessment for use in Manitoba, such as the Ontario Ministry of Health's Health Equity Impact Assessment model (2022).
- Develop or amend school division policy to prioritize equitable decision making for all resources (e.g., staffing, programming, resources, and budget).
- Identify the schools and communities with the highest needs based on socio-economic indicators (at the school division level) to prioritize actions for implementation (e.g., decision making, strategic planning, funding). Additional indicators should be considered (e.g., children in care).
- When allocating funding to school divisions across Manitoba, implement an equitable funding model that considers factors such as communities with high poverty, students who are in care, and students with different needs.

Introduction

In response to the recommendations from the Manitoba Commission on K to 12 Education (March 2022), the Manitoba government created and implemented Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan (April 2022).



The vision of the action plan is that **all students succeed no matter where they live, their backgrounds, or their individual circumstances**. It is guided by the following principles:

- advancing truth and reconciliation
- achieving equity
- ensuring inclusion
- striving for excellence
- prioritizing well-being
- enhancing accountability

The action plan included the creation of a Poverty and Education Task Force to examine the linkages between poverty and education, and put forward recommendations and actionable strategies.

This report summarizes the work and recommendations of the Poverty and Education Task Force, which was established in the fall of 2021. The task force brought together intersectoral partners, including community organizations, school divisions, education stakeholders, and Manitoba government representatives. See Appendix A for the full Terms of Reference.

Boivin Communication Group Inc. led the consultations on behalf of the Poverty and Education Task Force, with technical support provided by the project team with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. The task force worked alongside Boivin Communication Group Inc. and, through targeted consultation and the prioritization of youth who have lived experiences with poverty, listened to communities and stakeholders from across Manitoba about the realities of poverty and education.

The task force met on numerous occasions to review the findings and to formulate the recommendations and actionable strategies brought forward in this report. The recommendations are meant to inspire action to reduce the impact of poverty on education across Manitoba. A collaborative, intersectoral approach is required to continue improving the lives of children and youth living in poverty in Manitoba.

Background

Manitoba Commission for K to 12 Education

The work of the task force aligns with *Our Children's Success: MANITOBA'S FUTURE Report of the Commission on K to 12 Education* (March 2020).

In January 2019, the Manitoba government established the Manitoba Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education to undertake the largest and most comprehensive independent review of the K to 12 education system since 1959. The Commission was tasked with making recommendations to improve student outcomes, ensure long-term sustainability, and enhance public confidence in Manitoba's education system.

The Commission framed its final report around 10 imperatives to emphasize the actions required to position Manitoba as a world-class education system—one that demonstrates continuous growth and improvement and identifies what remains to be done to bring about the improvement that Manitoba's students deserve.

Although poverty was not a primary focus of the Commission on K to 12 Education, several of its recommendations are directly related to improving the quality of life for students who live in poverty and to supporting children and youth to meet their full potential.

K to 12 Commission Recommendations—Relationship to Poverty and Education Task Force Mandate

Directly Addressed by Task Force

#44 Establish a working group composed of representatives from Manitoba Education, school divisions (school boards, senior administration and teachers), parents, and students, to enhance current response to the impact of poverty in the school context to supporting alignment with the provincial poverty reduction strategy (p. 88).

#45 Improve access to nutritious food for Manitoba students and expand health-promoting meal programs in Manitoba schools through enhanced partnerships and coordination among organizations such as the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and governments, school divisions, communities, businesses, and industry to leverage local and provincial resources (p. 88).

#47 Require school divisions to develop improvement plans to specifically address the needs of their lowest performing schools that are most affected by poverty (p. 88).

Aligned with Task Force Objectives

#22 Work with government to clarify the mandate of Healthy Child Manitoba, to work across departments and with communities, to facilitate the development of coordinated policies, programs, and services that promote the best possible outcomes for children, given that no single department or area is currently structured to meet the holistic needs of children and youth as they mature and develop (p. 68).

#27 Implement high-impact, evidence-informed practices to close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, to remove barriers, and maximize curriculum implementation, teaching effectiveness, family outreach, student engagement, and mentoring supports (p. 77).

#31 Ensure that the education actions that fall exclusively under provincial jurisdiction outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action are implemented in Manitoba (p. 77).

#46 Work with the City of Winnipeg, other municipal governments in the province, and any other interested parties to remove transportation barriers (e.g., public transit fees) for students, including legislative provisions, to attend school and participate in after-school extracurricular activities (p. 88).

#48 Address disparities and enhance equity of access and educational opportunities for students in rural and northern regions, including subject area specialists, student services staff, career counsellors, and school principals and vice-principals (p. 92).

#55 Adopt a philosophy of Community Education across the province—rural, urban, and northern—to make schools the hubs of their communities (p. 104).

Poverty and Education

Education and poverty are inextricably linked. Much research has already occurred and it has told us that socio-economic status **is the single most powerful predictor of educational outcomes** (MCHP, 2015).

Poverty presents many challenges and should take into account the connections among race, culture and language, education, housing, geographic location, food security, family income, access to health services, family status, disability, gender, sexual orientation, and more. Another added layer of complexity includes the onset and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected people already living in poverty more deeply. Colonialism also presents a unique dimension for Indigenous Peoples.

> **Poverty and the legacy of colonialism are closely connected. Participants living in poverty shared stories of how racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, addictions and violence continue to present barriers in their lives… the experience of poverty for Indigenous peoples is different than other communities.**
>
> *(Manitoba Finance, 2018, p. 15)*

Canadian studies have demonstrated the association between low-income households and decreased school readiness. A report by Thomas (2006) concluded that children from lower income households score significantly lower on measures of vocabulary and communication skills, knowledge of numbers, copying and symbol use, ability to concentrate, and cooperative play with other children than children from higher income households. Janus et al (2003) found that schools with the largest proportion of children with low school readiness were from neighbourhoods of high social risk, including poverty.

Research by the Institute of Research and Public Policy (Montreal, Quebec) showed that differences between students from low and high socio-economic neighbourhoods were evident by Grade 3; children from low socio-economic neighbourhoods were less likely to pass a Grade 3 standards test (Brownwell et al., 2006). Willms (2003) established that children from lower socio-economic status (SES) households scored lower on a receptive vocabulary test than children who live with higher household income.

Defining Poverty

> **When examining poverty, it is important to look beyond resources and material possessions and consider that people living in poverty will in fact be deprived of life experiences. The impact of poverty impacts all systems including education, health, justice, housing, families, etc.**
>
> *(J. Bighorn, personal communication, 2022)*

The Government of Canada, within its Poverty Reduction Strategy (Manitoba Finance, 2018), defines poverty as "the condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society." The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is a measure of low income based on the cost of a specified basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living (Government of Canada, 2010).

Pathways to a Better Future: Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy defines poverty as "complex and multi-faceted. It is often perceived to be only a lack of money, but poverty is more than the absence of material things. Poverty is also inequitable access, absence of opportunities, social isolation, discrimination, and stigma. Although poverty has the potential to impact all Manitobans, segments of the population are more vulnerable than others and are disproportionately affected" (Manitoba Finance, 2018).

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy aims to break the cycle of poverty. The strategy is guided by the following vision: "All Manitobans have resources, opportunities, and access to achieve a better quality of life." Manitoba's Budget 2022 noted progress towards poverty reduction is illustrated by Statistics Canada data, which shows the child poverty rate in Manitoba has declined in recent years: there were 35,000 fewer Manitoban children living in poverty in 2020 than in 2015. That said, the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation have introduced new challenges that will influence poverty.

Engagement Overview

This report captures findings from targeted engagement that took place between April and November 2022, including the following:

- 1,627 responses to a high school student survey sent to all Manitoba high schools
- 12 in-person, community-based engagement sessions held with targeted participants (primarily youth)
- 26 virtual engagements with stakeholders who work in community organizations providing support to youth and families who live in poverty

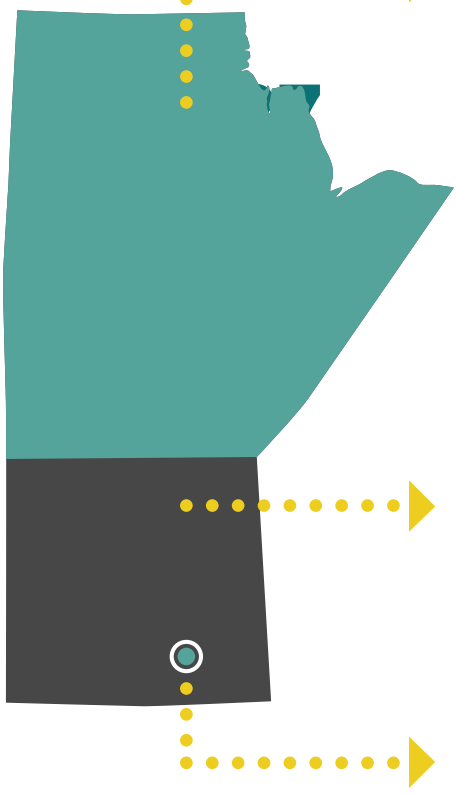
Boivin Communication Group Inc. facilitated much of the engagements, as summarized in the accompanying *Consultant Report*. The project lead continued the engagements that extended beyond the consultants' contracted time period. These findings are included as part of this final report.

In-person sessions consisted of in-person focus groups engaging with students living in poverty from across Manitoba (Winnipeg, rural, and northern regions) conducted between May and June 2022. In total, 266 students participated in 12 sessions. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide covered the following topics: poverty, food security, barriers to education for students living in poverty, support for Indigenous students, and support for children in care. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. For a summary of the engagement, please see Appendix B.

As noted in the *Consultant Report,* this consultation involved direct engagement with Manitoba students inside their own communities. Their thoughts and feelings were captured authentically during facilitated conversations, providing a meaningful perspective that is critical to understanding the context of this initiative.

12 sessions

266 participants



NORTHERN communities need

- access to affordable food
- affordable transportation
- more opportunities for youth
- more programs for children in care
- supports for Indigenous youth

RURAL communities need

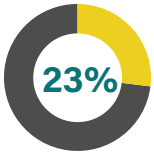
- healthy and accessible meal programs
- mental health supports
- transportation
- more access to programs in their communities
- supports to help youth find employment

URBAN communities need

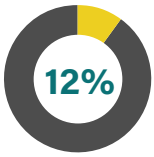
- healthy meal programs
- mental health supports
- transportation

A provincial high school student survey was also sent to all high schools across Manitoba. The survey was developed with feedback from Manitoba's Student Advisory Council. Superintendents of schools shared a poster to support student participation and parents/guardians were provided a letter of information. In total, 1627 students responded, of which 23 percent identified as Indigenous and 12 percent identified as living in northern Manitoba.

1627
total submissions



youth self-identified as **Indigenous** (First Nations, Inuit, & Métis)



youth identified as living in **northern Manitoba**

The student survey included open-ended and multiple-choice questions to gather the following information:

- their demographic features
- their understanding of poverty in Manitoba
- the barriers to education faced by students living in poverty
- suggestions for ways to best support
  - Indigenous youth
  - newcomer youth
  - children in care

Virtual stakeholders' sessions: A total of 26 stakeholder sessions were conducted either by the consultants or the project team. These sessions included leaders with experience and knowledge relative to poverty and specific subject-matter expertise, such as children in care, food access, Indigenous learners, socio-economic barriers to participation in education, and partnerships across community programs, agencies, and government departments. The sessions were conducted virtually via Zoom between March to November 2022. To ensure consistency with the in-person sessions, a similar semi-structured interview guide was used around topics of food security, barriers to education for students living in poverty, and support to Indigenous students and children in care. For a full list of engagements, see Appendix B.

Throughout the engagement, many students and stakeholders spoke to programs and initiatives that are reducing the impact of poverty on education. While a sample of best practices are shared throughout this report, it is recognized that there are many initiatives across Manitoba schools and school divisions beyond those mentioned in the report.

Findings

As noted in the *Consultant Report*, a remarkable pattern emerged that showed how closely aligned the reflections and recommended approaches for tackling poverty are among an array of those who were consulted. It did not matter whether they were students, Elders, stakeholders, leaders, parents, or educators—all acknowledged there are things that are working and provided details on what they were and why they succeed. They also all identified the key barriers that lead to poverty and perpetuate it, and the adverse impacts these barriers have on student learning in Manitoba.

The remainder of the report highlights what we heard, salient research, work underway, best practices, and recommendations surrounding the following themes:

- barriers to participation, including nutrition, mental health, racism, transportation, and technology
- special consideration of supports for Indigenous students and children in care
- need for intersectoral, holistic approaches, as well as equity in education

Beyond these findings are the following cross-cutting themes:

- Through engagements with youth, community, and stakeholders, barriers were identified that prevent students who live in poverty from being present, engaged, and doing well in school. These include transportation, mental health, technology, and racism and discrimination. While the findings vary slightly across the province, there is consensus that these barriers need action. It is clear that school attendance is a critical factor in student success. Students who attend regularly are more engaged in learning, have a greater sense of belonging to the community, and are more likely to graduate. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning has created a new policy directive and action plan for enhancing student presence and engagement. The action plan will leverage findings from the Poverty and Education Task Force and identify high-impact strategies to reducing these barriers to participation. Best practices identified throughout the engagement will also be highlighted in the attendance work underway.

- As noted in the *Consultant Report*, participants across all touchpoints throughout the engagement process were united in their observations that **there is a deep relationship between health outcomes, school success, socio-economic status, and overall quality of life**.

- Equitable funding was mentioned repeatedly as another cross-cutting theme, with a focus on funding being predictable and long term. A significant amount of time and energy is being spent applying for grants, planning, and trying to adapt to the unknowns year over year. Participants indicated that funding should be monitored, assessed, and distributed equitably to create the stability needed to flourish in the long term. The new funding model for K to 12 education that is currently underway provides an important opportunity to address these concerns, as it aims to increase base funding by reducing the number of separate grants and realigning how funds are distributed to ensure more equity and a focus on a range of division-specific factors.

1. Food Security and Nutrition

What We Heard

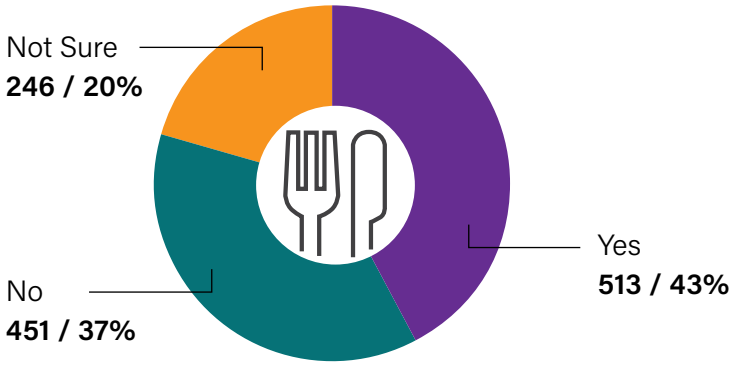
Students who attended the in-person sessions identified the number-one factor that can support students living in poverty is access to free and healthy food at school. The high school student survey findings and stakeholders confirmed a lack of food security as the number-one barrier preventing students who live in poverty from attending and doing well in school. Clean drinking water, access to healthy foods, and intersectoral approaches and solutions in communities with higher poverty were also cited during the engagements.

Students noted that breakfast and lunch programs are extremely beneficial in terms of helping them feel safe, stable, cared for, and incentivized to go to school. Students identified the following key components of a successful lunch or breakfast program:

- no costs attached
- equity-based meal programs to ensure food is available to those who need it
- culturally relevant foods and lessons related to them
- healthy, nutritious options, alongside learning about sustainability

In the high school student survey, youth were asked if they were aware of a free breakfast or lunch program at their school. Although the majority of students were aware, some students were uncertain of meal programs offered in their schools. This suggests that schools and school divisions have work to do around communication of the availability of meal programs with students and their families (Boivin Communication Group, 2022).

Breakfast/Lunch Program(s) at My School



Students shared ideas about food-related solutions for youth in poverty, including the following top recommendations:

1. more free food programs at school
2. community garden and farming
3. learning about living off the land
4. healthy food options at school
5. learning more about nutrition at school
6. fundraisers/donations/food drives
7. more funding/government support

Students made the following suggestions for free food programming in schools:

- increased awareness of availability
- availability for after-school hours and during holidays
- fewer rules around access
- be healthier and teach about food sovereignty

> **"Provide a breakfast plan for anyone wanting in an open area before class starts and keep it running through first class for kids who don't have an opportunity to come before school."**
>
> *– student survey, northern region*

The Poverty and Education Task Force also established a sub-committee that heard about the importance of food security and access to nutritious food, as well as the importance of food and nutrition education in schools and their communities. The subcommittee views food security as an important part of the **"building blocks required in response to poverty and (its effects on) education."**

The stakeholders engaged by the task force spoke about the following topics:

- Many K to 12 food programs operate daily with strong community partnerships.
- There is a need to help students, families, and communities, which can build capacity for sustainable food growth.
- Providing food is a good start, but a more comprehensive approach to food literacy and lifelong healthy habits is required within the curriculum, with focus on food sovereignty (i.e., how to grow, harvest, and preserve).
- There is a need for Indigenous and culturally relevant foods and teachings that represent children in the classroom in order to help foster a greater connection with community and break away from colonial mindsets about food in western cultures (Boivin Communication Group, 2022).
- Several stakeholders spoke about the importance of teaching and learning how to live off the land.

Overall, the engagements have highlighted the desire for more free, healthy, accessible, and culturally relevant food for students in Manitoba schools. Many successful programs are already in place and there is opportunity for growth and expansion.

What the Research Says

Food security is often described as having enough money to purchase or access a sufficient amount and variety of food to live a healthy lifestyle. Access to nutritious food is a daily challenge for people living in poverty, which means that people eat what they can afford, not what they need for good health (Manitoba Finance, 2018). Food insecurity affects individuals' health and well-being and is related to other markers of social and economic disadvantage, as it is most prevalent among households with low incomes, lone-parent families, those who rent rather than own housing, and those who identify as Indigenous, Black, or people of colour (FoodARC, n.d.).

Access to healthy food has been identified as a barrier to school participation for children and youth living in poverty. It has an impact on the social determinants of health. People experiencing food insecurity are more likely to suffer from poor health and increased levels of stress. Children experiencing household food insecurity may experience increased behavioural and emotional challenges, as well as challenges with attendance and engagement (Faught et al., 2017).

Parents in food-insecure households are also more likely to experience high levels of stress, which may influence their ability to support their children with school attendance and achievement (Ashiabi, 2005; Whitaker, Phillips and Orzol, 2006). These impacts have the potential to build over the life cycle and have accumulated over generations (Campaign 2000, 2021).

Work Underway

Canada is the only G-7 nation that does not have a national school food program (USASK, 2022). The 2019 Federal Budget included a $134 million commitment over five years to support food policy to strengthen food systems and improve food security, with a commitment to work with provinces and territories towards the creation of a National School Food Program. In 2022, the Government of Canada announced consultations on a pan-Canadian school food policy to explore how more Canadian children can receive nutritious food at school. The policy will seek to guide the expansion of school meal programming based on key principles and objectives, while ensuring a flexible approach that leaves room for local adaptation (Government of Canada, 2022).

Canadian national dietary guidelines exist, but there remains wide variation in provincial and local-level school nutrition guidelines, policies, and nutrition programming. British Columbia is the first Canadian province to tackle a review of its public policy and programs (House of Commons, 2022). Feed BC and the Ministry of Education have explored food opportunities in the K to 12 education sector through an online survey, which was used to update food policies and guidelines in schools (Government of British Columbia, 2020).

Food insecurity is a critical issue in Manitoba, and it is heightened within northern Indigenous communities due to remoteness and inaccessibility, limited perishable foods, high food prices, escalating transportation costs, and uncertainty of travel on winter ice roads (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012). Although food insecurity has been a common topic in northern Manitoba for generations, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity for children and families, especially those living in poverty.

In Manitoba, many K to12 public schools offer a variety of breakfast, lunch, or snack programming. Manitoba Healthy Food in Schools (n.d.) has guidelines and policy for school food programs to follow, and students learn about nutrition through the health curriculum.

The pandemic brought on new challenges related to the delivery and accessibility of school nutrition programs and increased the need for food for many families. In response, many school divisions created alternative food programs for students, such as food hampers. Funding for K to 12 schools' food programming is shared among the Manitoba government, school divisions, sponsors, charities, and community partnerships. Depending on the school, various staff or volunteers assist in the delivery of food-related programs.

Manitoba funds the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) to provide grants to schools. In 2021/22, these grants supported close to 34,000 children through 302 programs. (CNCM, 2022). In September 2022, the government announced an increase in funding to CNCM this year by an additional $1.3 million to further strengthen school nourishment programming across Manitoba. Bringing the total provincial funding for school nutrition programs this year to $2.5 million will ensure thousands more Manitoba families will have access to these vital school nourishment programs.

Some schools receive grant funding through the Breakfast Club of Canada. In 2021/22, the Breakfast Club of Canada served 91 school nutrition programs and reached 17,042 students daily in Manitoba (BCC, 2022).

Recommendation: Enhance food security and increase access to nutritious food for students living in poverty.

- Review in-school meal programs and partnerships to improve access and ensure equitable distribution of funding and resources.
  - Prioritize students living in poverty and schools/communities experiencing high poverty.
  - Prioritize student voices in food security solutions (e.g., include student voices as part of divisional/school programming and decision making around nutrition).
- Provide students and families with access to community gardens and kitchen-related spaces in schools for meal planning and preparation, especially in communities experiencing high poverty.
- Pursue public and private partnerships to support and enhance school- and community-based nutrition programming, including access to nutrition outside of school hours.
- Review and revise the Healthy Food in Schools website, existing guidelines, and policy documents to ensure Indigenous values on food, diet, and health are reflected.
- Revise existing Manitoba K to 12 curriculum (i.e., physical education, health, human ecology, and vocational education) to include learnings about Indigenous teachings and worldviews, food sovereignty, meal planning, and long-term food security. This process should include working together with diverse partners and stakeholders.
- Expand horticulture programming across Manitoba schools by ensuring flexibility within course offerings. This should provide more flexibility in curriculum for credit attainment in areas such as gardening, aquaponics, and food sovereignty.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Food Councils	Established within Manitoban municipalities and school divisions.
Partnerships	School divisions partner with community organizations including Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba, Manitoba Harvest, Breakfast Club of Canada, President's Choice Power Full Kids, and many others.
Northern Manitoba Food, Culture, and Community Collaborative	A collaboration of northern community people and organizations working together to foster healthier and stronger communities (no one-size-fits-all). Projects vary depending on the community-led local food solution: hunting, fishing, gardening, chickens, bees, etc.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Aki Foods: Meechim Project	An Indigenous non-profit social enterprise focused on developing healthy food-based projects that project economic development. The project aims to grow healthy, locally grown food for the community and provides education and training to youth.
Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, Province of Manitoba	For people to define their own food systems to access healthy foods to increase food security efforts at the community level. Supports projects that contribute to the development of culturally relevant, healthy food systems and increased access to food.
Canadian Feed the Children	Supports community-led food security initiatives that aim to reduce hunger by increasing access to good food and traditional food practices. Works with communities to implement school food programs, nutrition education, land-based education, community kitchens, and good food boxes.
Breakfast Club of Canada	A national organization that supports more than 3300 school breakfast programs across Canada, working with local, provincial, and regional partnerships. For the past five years, it has been advocating for a national food program.
NorWest Co-op	Provides a welcoming place where people come to grow, cook, share, and advocate for good food. Provides emergency access to high-quality food in a dignified setting. People share meals together and learn cooking and gardening skills to address underlying issues of hungry, poverty, and poor health.
Community Pantry	Coordinated in the community in partnership with Harvest Manitoba with support from Jordan's Principle, food is delivered via ice road. A northern food depot is being considered.
Other Effective Policies and Practices	
Nutrition Pantries (NP)	A program in Toronto, with a central pantry for high schools in need where students can take a week's worth of lunch home.
Nutrition Policies	In the United Kingdom, if a school population is at a predetermined level of high poverty, a lunch program is provided to students in that school.

2. Mental Health and Well-Being

It should be recognized that mental health challenges and addiction are prominent among all citizens, but generally hit harder for those living in poverty as they are often without the structural supports needed to get help and they already face greater pressures due to limited resources.

What We Heard

Feedback from the high school student survey and in-person sessions identified impacts to mental health and related barriers to participation for students living in poverty that prevent them from attending and doing well in school. Approximately 60 percent of students responded that feelings of sadness and anxiety would prevent youth who live in poverty from attending school or doing well. Most newcomer (74 percent) and Indigenous students (67 percent) shared this opinion.

Students living in poverty identified the following as contributing factors to their overall mental health:

- life conditions are stressful, as their basic needs are not being met (i.e., food, safe/stable place to live, clothing)
- living situations are unstable and include family violence
- experiences of bullying at school due to lack of appropriate clothing and supplies
- experiences of racism

During the engagement sessions, students frequently used the words *anxiety, stress*, and *hopelessness* to express the heavy burden of poverty on their well-being. Other participants highlighted the urgent need to promote well-being.

During an engagement session held with Manitoba's Student Advisory Council, members recommended that promoting student mental health should be prioritized in Manitoba. They stressed the importance of increasing awareness about mental health to reduce stigma and barriers.

Furthermore, we heard there is a need for mental health counsellors and addictions specialists to be made available to both families and children in schools. With greater access points in familiar and trusted settings, families may feel more included and better able to get the help they need and deserve.

What the Research Says

Literature indicates that students living in poverty are more exposed to adverse childhood experiences than their peers (Anda et al., 2010). Students experiencing poverty are comparatively more exposed to challenging life conditions that can have a negative impact on their stress response system, causing "toxic stress" that is known to have an effect on brain development and physical, behavioural, and cognitive health (Francis et al., 2018).

Students living in poverty may encounter barriers to accessing mental health services. The fear of stigma from others can result in self-blame, which may prevent them from asking for help and seeking services (Smith et al., 2013). Living in poverty may also have direct effects on a student's mood, including feelings of hopelessness and sadness, relationship challenges, and academic achievement.

Work Underway

Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan identifies student engagement and well-being as a pillar for student success, with a priority focus on mental health and well-being and identifying actions to remove barriers to participation in learning, including a focus on the effects of poverty on education and student engagement.

In 2022, the Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness launched a five-year plan titled *A Pathway to Mental Health and Community Wellness* (Manitoba Mental Health and Community Wellness, 2002) to improve wellness, mental health, and substance use and addictions services, centred around the following strategic areas:

- equitable access and coordination
- mental well-being and chronic disease prevention (which includes supporting and investing in child and youth development)
- quality and innovation
- governance and accountability
- Indigenous partnerships and wellness

The roadmap acknowledges that supporting children, youth, and their parents/caregivers is crucial to their development and not only leads to better health outcomes, but also improved school achievements and an increased feeling of resilience and belonging. To do this, there has been increased mental health promotion programming in the school system, strengthening of the Mental Health Promotion in Schools framework (Healthy Child Manitoba, n.d.), and a focus on expanding the availability of school-based services and programming across the province.

Recommendation: Support the mental health and well-being of students living in poverty.

- Provide improved access to culturally safe mental health supports and trauma-informed practices. This includes the redistribution of existing funding and staffing to provide easily accessible, barrier-free access to students living in poverty in school.
  - Consider various methods for students to access culturally safe mental health services (e.g., in person, online, telephone) to ensure accessibility across Winnipeg and rural and northern communities.
  - Pursue targeted programs, such as the Indigenous wellness program Kids Help Phone: Brighter Days (online module-based training for Indigenous youth).
- Ensure equity in decision making in the allocation and distribution of clinical support services, with increased supports given to schools with low socio-economic indicators.
- Prioritize clinical services in the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning workforce planning strategy.
- Continue funding mental health projects in schools through Manitoba's Teachers' Idea Fund, prioritizing equity-based initiatives.
- Build mental health and wellness into the provincial curriculum and professional development for all education staff and school leaders, especially in communities with high poverty.
- Continue to authentically involve Elders and Knowledge Keepers in schools to provide students with culturally appropriate and safe supports.

3. Racism and Discrimination

What We Heard

Racism and discrimination were raised in the high school survey and in-person sessions with students. Two youth shared the following:

> **People really need to see the issues and that things are unfair. If you're Indigenous you automatically have an uphill battle, and you will have to deal with racism if people know you are Indigenous.**

> **More classroom education is needed on the impacts of poverty, racism, and discrimination.**

Across the province, students cited strong relationships with teachers and school staff when they understand racism and its impacts, and this is viewed as a supportive factor for youth who live in poverty. There were also suggestions made to ensure diversity among school leaders and teachers while providing training to teachers and staff about diversity and culture.

Although the high school student survey was intended to collect information on how to best support students who live in poverty, there were a number of racist comments made towards students living in poverty and Indigenous people. These comments demonstrate that there is a number of students in Manitoba who do not understand poverty, its root causes, and its impacts. There is a need for more education on poverty and racism in our province.

What the Research Says

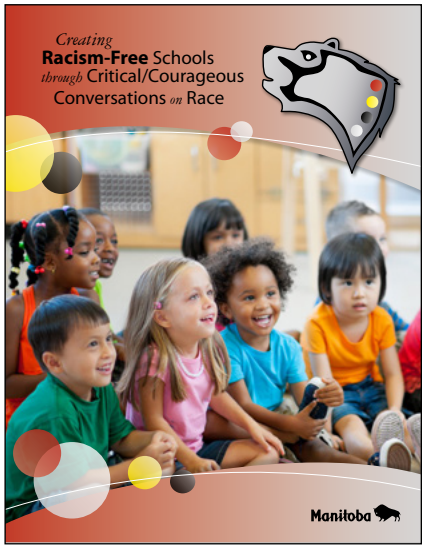
There is a clear, direct link between poverty and racism (Silver, 2019), including violence, abuse, and the exclusion of students on the basis of their race or ethnicity (Mishna et al., 2020). As a result, students living in poverty are more likely to feel unsafe and that they don't belong (Glew et al., 2005). Structural racism exists in schools, influencing decisions around staffing, curriculum, budgets, strategic priorities, values, school year calendars, and policies (Juutilainen, 2017). Its impact on students and their overall health and wellness within our public education system cannot be ignored.

> **"Racism is a key determinant of health, undermining physical and mental health and well-being."**
>
> *– Office of Anti-Racism (2022)*

Work Underway

Leaders across the education system, like other sectors, are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of racism on educational outcomes and the importance of equity. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning has recognized the importance of equity by expanding its vision to focus on all students and to re-examine how funding is distributed. The department has developed a new Framework for Learning to guide curriculum and assessment development. The framework aims to promote human rights and responsible citizenship with a focus on Indigenous perspectives, inclusive practices, gender diversity, and anti-racism.

Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race, published in 2017 by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, is a resource that continues to promote conversations on racism to create inclusive and equitable classrooms and schools while highlighting the unique experiences of racism for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This document provides information on the impact of racism, acknowledges our shared history, and is intended to stimulate dialogue to "contribute to the reconciliation of Indigenous Peoples and all Canadians."



The Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle has released three *State of Equity In Education Reports* (2019, 2020, 2021) that "promote evidence-based strategies for the development and implementation of equity-based education programs and policies in Winnipeg." An annual "Calls to Action" report is released to track the progress of school divisions in Winnipeg in implementing equity-based education initiatives. The results indicate that Indigenous Peoples are underrepresented at all levels of education, including among senior leadership and school trustees.

As raised in the *Consultant Report*, there is a need for greater representation of minority communities across all leadership positions in schools, government departments, not-for-profit agencies, the justice system, and health care facilities. It is important for children in particular to see themselves reflected in the fabric of these institutions that seek to establish trust, as they interact with them regularly. One stakeholder lamented the lack of diverse representation across systems and emphasized the need for it: **"It's so important to ask questions, such as 'Does your teacher look like you if you're a racialized or Indigenous student?'; 'Does your principal look like you?'".**

Seven Oaks School Division has developed an anti-racism policy to acknowledge and address the impact of racism to ensure more equitable school operations and decision making. The department is working with Seven Oaks and other divisions that are engaged in similar work to develop a provincial anti-racism policy to support all schools and divisions, particularly smaller ones. A provincial framework will assist our system in the development of equity audits and action plans that the Equity Matters Coalition is recommending. Winnipeg School Division has committed to establishing an equity office similar to larger divisions in Ontario. While that may make sense for a larger division, we need a provincial strategy that fits for Manitoba.

Recommendation: Ensure a culturally safe, anti-racist, and inclusive learning environment for students living in poverty.

- Ensure supports and services are provided in a way that protects the dignity of students living in poverty (e.g., distribution practices that are needs-based, accessible, barrier-free, inclusive, safe, and non-stigmatizing).
- Create hiring and retention practices and policies to increase and ensure school staff are inclusive of equity-deserving groups. Teachers of Indigenous languages, formally credentialed or not, should be considered. Recommendations made in the *State of Equity in Education Report* by the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle should support decision making.
- Develop and provide mandatory professional learning for all staff on communication, cultural safety, anti-racism, and inclusive educational practices. Consider partnerships among government, school divisions, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, and community organizations.
- Review existing curriculum for opportunities to include instruction on the topic of poverty, its consequences, and its root causes in order to create an empathic environment, expand awareness, and reduce stigmatization.
- Develop and implement a provincial anti-racism policy for all school divisions as a means of providing additional pathways to students living in poverty to report and reduce incidents of racism and discrimination. This includes strengthening anti-racism content in curriculum for all grades.
- Continue to implement *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—Manitoba's Indigenous Education Policy Framework* province-wide.
- Continue to collect information about the school experiences of students living in poverty to better understand and address concerns related to racism and discrimination. This could be collected through an annual K to 12 provincial census (e.g., Ontario, Alberta).

4. Transportation

Transportation is often a barrier to education for many students. While transportation is available for some (see *The Public Schools Act*), public transportation may not be available and/or affordable in every community, limiting accessibility for students. The issues students and families experience accessing transportation differ based on geographical location.

What We Heard

During the consultations, students identified the high cost and lack of available transportation as barriers to attending school for those living in poverty. Students from rural communities are the most affected. Students shared that offering free bus tickets or free transportation would improve their school attendance.

One student highlighted their need for transportation after school hours.

> **"Provide transportation or safe rides for tutoring and places to study for after school hours as they are more unsafe."**
>
> *– high school student from Winnipeg, in-person session*

One stakeholder made a presentation about the transportation barrier during an engagement session.

> **"The cost of transportation to school for students 12 and over is reported to be a significant barrier.... The choice for some families is described as being between having a lunch or bus fare."**
>
> *– virtual stakeholder session*

Transportation has been identified by youth and stakeholders as a significant barrier to school attendance, participation, and achievement for students who live in poverty across Manitoba. Both accessibility and affordability were brought forward by community members as critical components.

What the Research Says

Transportation is a barrier causing inequity in access to education for students who live in poverty (Birioukov, 2020). As a result of cost, location, and accessibility, there appears to be a strong association between the lack of school transportation and absenteeism in students. The absenteeism rate for students living in poverty is reported to be higher as they begin high school due to a typical and varied change in which students are no longer provided support with transportation. Inversely, when transportation is provided to students, they are more likely attend school (Gottfried, 2017).

During consultations for Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy, participants shared their insights on the importance of public transportation, difficulties of limited income, and the choice between basic needs and transportation (Manitoba Finance, 2018).

Work Underway

According to *The Public Schools Act* (PSA):

- Transportation is required for resident students that do not live in the same city, town, or community as the closest school who offers the appropriate education required by the student. The school should be accessible via an approved school bus route.
- Divisions must transport anyone who is unable to walk to school because of physical disability.
- School divisions can provide transportation and be funded for K–6 resident students who have to walk more than 1.6 km to reach the school or Grades 7 to 12 students who have to walk more than 1.6 km to reach public transportation.

According to the Pupil Transportation Unit within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, many school divisions offer "fee for service" for non-eligible students living within 1.6 km of school. Some school divisions provide accessible transportation for Kindergarten to Grade 6 students living in poverty when proof of income status is shared. There are certainly opportunities to reduce these costs. The School District of Mystery Lake, for example, works with the City of Thompson to ensure free bus fare for students.

Enhancing equity for the transportation system is a priority outlined in the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Plan. Important elements of the plan include providing additional fare options and partnering with community groups that support low-income individuals to help increase access to the WINNpass program. It is not clear if the City of Brandon has similar plans in place. Regardless, there are partnership opportunities.

Recommendation: Enhance transportation accessibility for students living in poverty.

- Review and modify *The Public Schools Act* (PSA) to ensure policies offer barrier-free transportation services to all students living in poverty. This includes revisiting transportation distance requirements (1.6 km) to allow for increased flexibility for students living in poverty. (Currently, the transportation section of *The Public Schools Act* mentions other sub-groups such as youth with additional needs but does not include students living in poverty.)
- Consider alternative modes of transportation in rural and northern communities due to a lack of public transportation options and extreme weather conditions.
- Pursue public and private partnerships to offer free bus passes to all students living in poverty in communities where public transit is available. This includes partnerships with all levels of government (e.g., Department of Families [Employment and Income Assistance] and the City of Winnipeg and Brandon).

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
City of Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy: Implementation Plan (Fall 2021 to Spring 2023)	■ Continue and expand the Low Income Transit Pass (WINNpass) program, and explore the introduction of an additional fare product, such as a single ride option, to increase accessibility of the program to people who cannot afford a monthly pass. ■ Transit Pass Pilot Program: Investigate and report back on a conceptual outline of a pilot project that would collaborate with partners to provide free transit passes to youth aging out of care. ■ Continue to enhance Winnipeg Transit and Winnipeg Transit+ services for people with disabilities, including services and route planning for geographic areas of higher poverty. ■ Work with community organizations, and shelter providers—particularly those working with youth at risk and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people—to increase awareness of the City of Winnipeg's Emergent Need Transit Policy, which allows for individuals at risk due to cold or a storm to ride a bus to get to a warm space, even without fare. As part of this, work to ensure open lines of communication around transit needs and challenges of unsheltered residents. ■ Promote the "request stop" service and "see something, say something" campaigns on Winnipeg Transit buses on a regular basis, to increase the safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people riding Transit (NWAC 4.4). ■ Explore partnership opportunities to bridge Winnipeg Transit service with safe-walk/safe-ride programs and community safety patrols, to increase the safety and security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people in getting around Winnipeg (NWAC 4.4).
School Division Alternatives	Some school divisions provide funding to schools to provide bus tokens or are helping subsidize bus passes for youth who would otherwise be unable to afford them.
Other Community Options	Other options beyond public transportation: co-operatives, shuttles, and ride-share programs help to reduce transportation barriers within communities.

5. Technology

What We Heard

Technological devices and wireless connections are increasingly necessary for students to fully participate in classroom activities, whether attending school in person or virtually. Systemic issues around digital inequity exist in Manitoba communities and schools.

Participants in the engagements spoke about lack of technology as a barrier to education for students living in poverty. The engagement findings show that access to devices and Internet connectivity affect both Indigenous and newcomer youth more than their peers. Students living in northern communities highlighted the need for reliable Internet connection.

What the Research Says

Although Canada is considered one of the most wired countries in the world, Internet availability in northern Manitoban communities is limited. According to Statistics Canada, 95 percent of Canadians in the highest income quartile are connected to the Internet, while 62 percent in the lowest income quartile have Internet access (2021).

Inequitable access to technology and Internet connectivity were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic as schools shifted to remote learning (Beaunoyer et al., 2020). Researchers confirm that access to technology is not equitable across socio-demographic variables and may increase the educational gap for students living in poverty because of the high cost of devices and Internet connectivity (Beaunoyer et al., 2020).

The Office of the Auditor General's review of the K to 12 pandemic response (2022) found that "communities where there was unreliable internet connectivity or for families with socio-economic barriers to accessing and using technology, students and in some cases educators were automatically at a disadvantage" (Auditor General Manitoba, 2022).

The following excerpts from consultations for the new provincial online high school are also applicable to this report:

- Education leaders from across Manitoba noted that Internet connectivity remains a challenge that both students and educators face. Although there has been progress within some school divisions, it is still an obstacle to online learning for some. The lack of strong, reliable infrastructure may hinder the teacher's ability to provide immediate feedback and engage with students during online learning.
- Participants recommended that technology and Internet connectivity supports be included in the development of a provincial online high school. Consideration should also be given to Internet and technology access barriers for all students, particularly in regions where Internet functionality is unreliable, unavailable, and/or unaffordable, and where students lack a safe and quiet space to learn. Lastly, education leaders recommended that the same technology software and applications be used across school divisions to facilitate ease of access and use.

Work Underway

In fall 2021, the Manitoba government signed a memorandum of understanding with Xplornet Communications Inc. to connect more than 125,000 unserved or underserved Manitobans to reliable, high-speed Internet services. The agreement provides broadband services to nearly 30 First Nations and approximately 270 rural and northern communities. Additionally, this agreement will serve 350 communities with cell phone access.

Practices were implemented during the pandemic to reduce Internet connectivity challenges and increase access to technology for those out of range of service and those who could not afford Internet or devices. This included lending laptops and devices to students, installing Wi-Fi hotspots in school parking lots, and providing Starlink service to students (high-speed, low-latency broadband Internet for remote and rural locations).

The department will open a new provincial online high school in September 2023 so that students from across the province can access the breadth of public education, especially when it is not provided at the local school. By considering "offline" solutions for those with connectivity issues, these students will continue to participate in high-quality learning and be able to acquire all credits for a high school diploma even if they homeschooled until Grade 9. The online high school will leverage the 25-year legacy of InformNet, an online high school governed by Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia school divisions. Through their leadership and cooperation, this school is being extended provincially.

Recommendation: Support digital equity through accessibility for students living in poverty.

- Allocate equitable funding for devices for students living in poverty. This may include increasing the capacity of computer loan programs and providing students living in poverty with after-school technology user support, including troubleshooting and repairs.
- Reduce risks associated with expanded access to devices, including exploitation and abuse, by
  - involving students and educating them about the risks
  - notifying caregivers
  - updating privacy and safety settings
  - reviewing content
  - recognizing signs of abuse
- Consideration should be given to partnerships with community organizations, and the role they play in ensuring the safe use of technology for students outside of school hours.
- Partner with service providers to expand affordable Internet access in rural and northern Manitoba. A focus should be placed on partnering with service providers to provide free/low-cost Internet access in schools experiencing greater poverty.
- Promote existing programs to expand access to Internet connections, including the following:
  - Government of Canada *Connecting Families* program, which is designed to reduce fees for Internet connection to families with low incomes
  - Universal Broadband Fund, which was developed as part of the federal *High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy*

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Accessible Technology	Manitoba's guide for the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program states that equity must be taken into account, and that finding a solution to allow for equitable access for all students may not always be a top priority for schools. North End Connect Computer Program helps North End residents access a free computer through a partnership with Computers for Schools MB and the Internet Society–Manitoba Chapter
Community Access to Internet Connection	Frontier School Division has sourced Starlink, an independent operator, to provide northern and remote communities increased connection.
Required Technology for Remote Schooling	In response to digital inequities and accessibility issues, several school divisions, organizations, and governments provided disadvantaged students with devices, such as computers, tablets, and Internet access, or organized their teaching through various mediums (OECD, 2020).

6. Supports for Indigenous Students

What We Heard

There was a significant focus on supports for Indigenous students living in poverty across the engagements. Students who self-declared as Indigenous identified the following top concerns:

- accessing free food
- providing basic necessities, including clothing and school supplies
- listening to and helping to educate students and staff about poverty
- ensuring an Indigenous-inclusive, culturally safe, and welcoming environment that is understanding of colonialism and free of racism and discrimination
- teaching Indigenous cultures, languages, and histories
- seeing themselves reflected in the classroom
- having Elders and Knowledge Keepers in schools

Overall, we heard that Indigenous students living in poverty face intersecting barriers. There is no easy solution, but a starting point is re-imagining pathways to success and school leaders supporting programs that are already working.

Stakeholders spoke at length about how to support Indigenous students effectively and the importance of Indigenous education, land-based learning, and the learning of cultures, languages, and ceremonies.

> **"Perhaps there are opportunities to include more land-based and cultural education in the school system. It seems like this is happening on a one-off basis, based on individual teachers' interest or initiative…"**
>
> *– interdepartmental session*

> **"The English language curriculum is written for the general student population, not First Nations youth."**
>
> *– stakeholder, Indigenous learners session*

> **What will impact poverty? It really starts with courage in leadership.**
>
> *– intersectoral solutions session, educator*

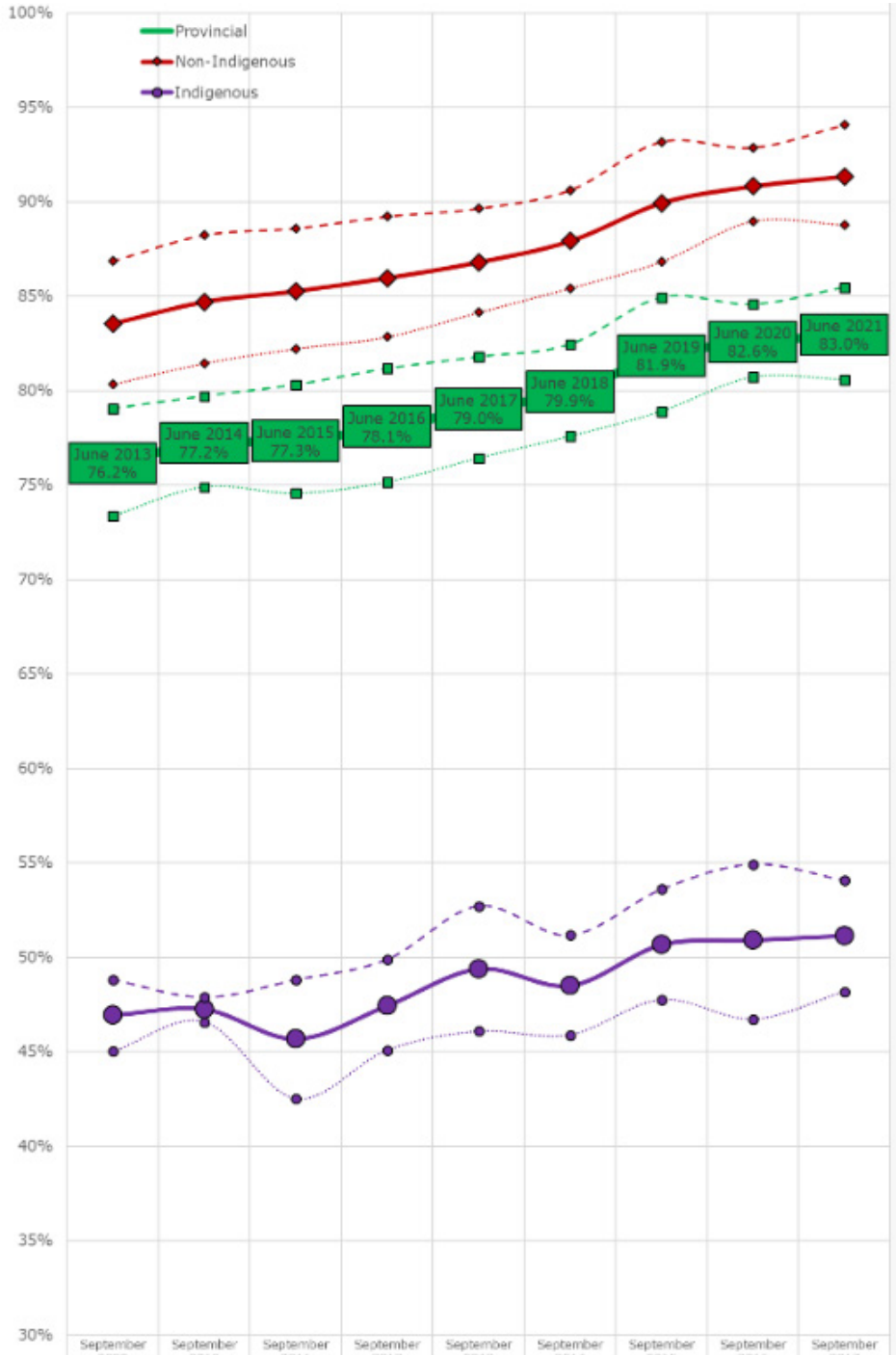
What the Research Says

Poverty negatively affects all youth but is amplified for Indigenous students. Indigenous people in Canada continue to experience greater inequities on a number of factors that affect their lives. As a result, they bear a greater burden of poor health compared to non-Indigenous Canadians.

Manitoba has one of the highest Indigenous populations in Canada (175,020 in 2016; 187,890 in 2021) and, according to Statistics Canada, it is among the fastest growing population (Statistics Canada, 2022). Research indicated that some Indigenous children are starting school behind their peers in at least one of five early developmental areas (Halseth and Greenwood, 2019). This is particularly relevant as Manitoba has the highest rate of Indigenous child poverty in Canada (Campaign 2000, 2021).

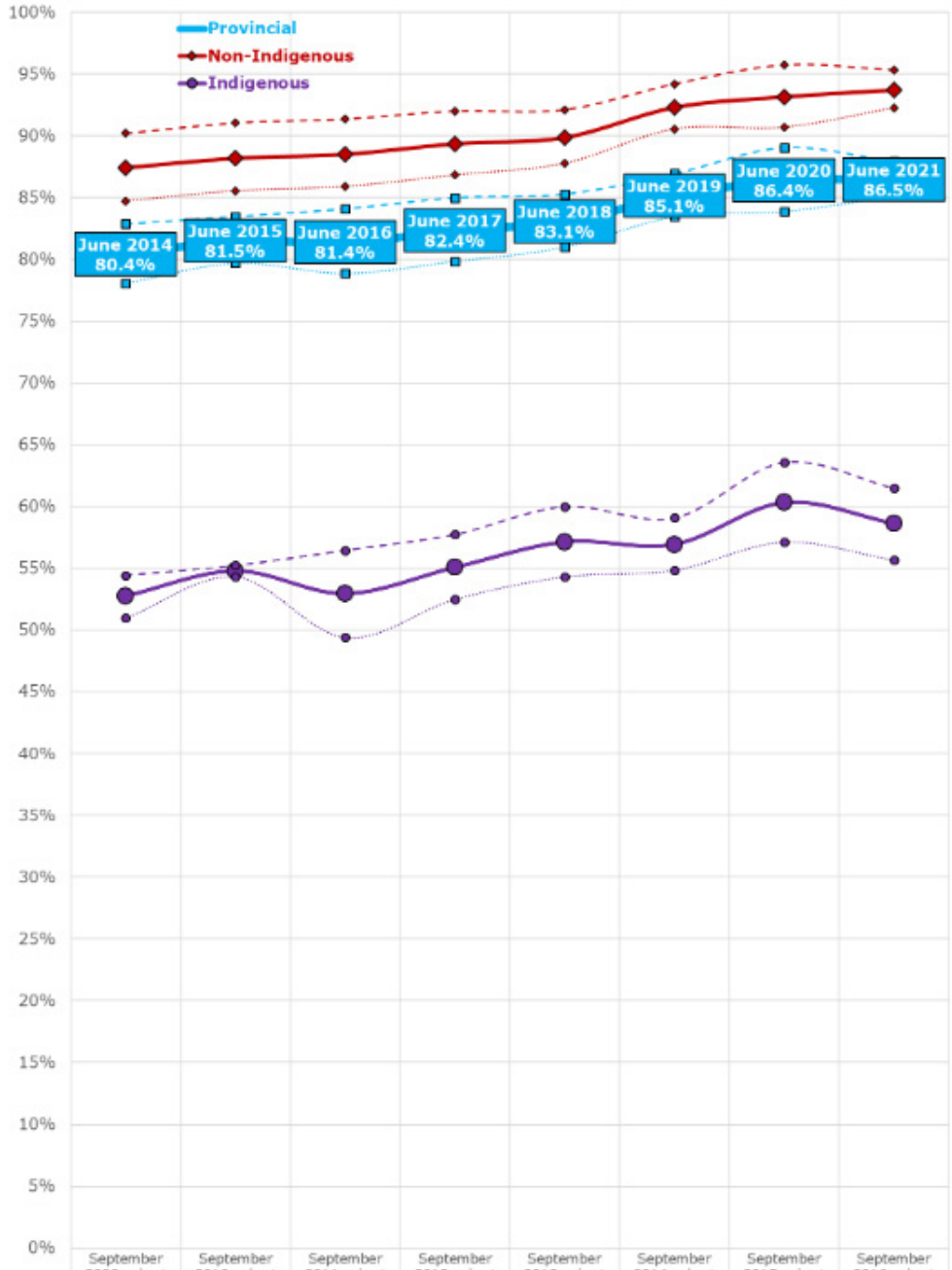
Studies have shown socio-economic status is a strong predictor for measuring the social determinants of health, including educational outcomes. According to data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI), Indigenous children in Manitoba growing up in poverty experience gaps in their educational outcomes (from as early as five) when compared to non-Indigenous youth (Province of Manitoba, 2022). The achievement gap—more accurately described as an opportunity gap—that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is seen through to Grade 12. Data below illustrates Manitoba's four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates reported by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (MEECL, *High School Graduation Rates,* 2022).

Four Year High School Graduation Rates



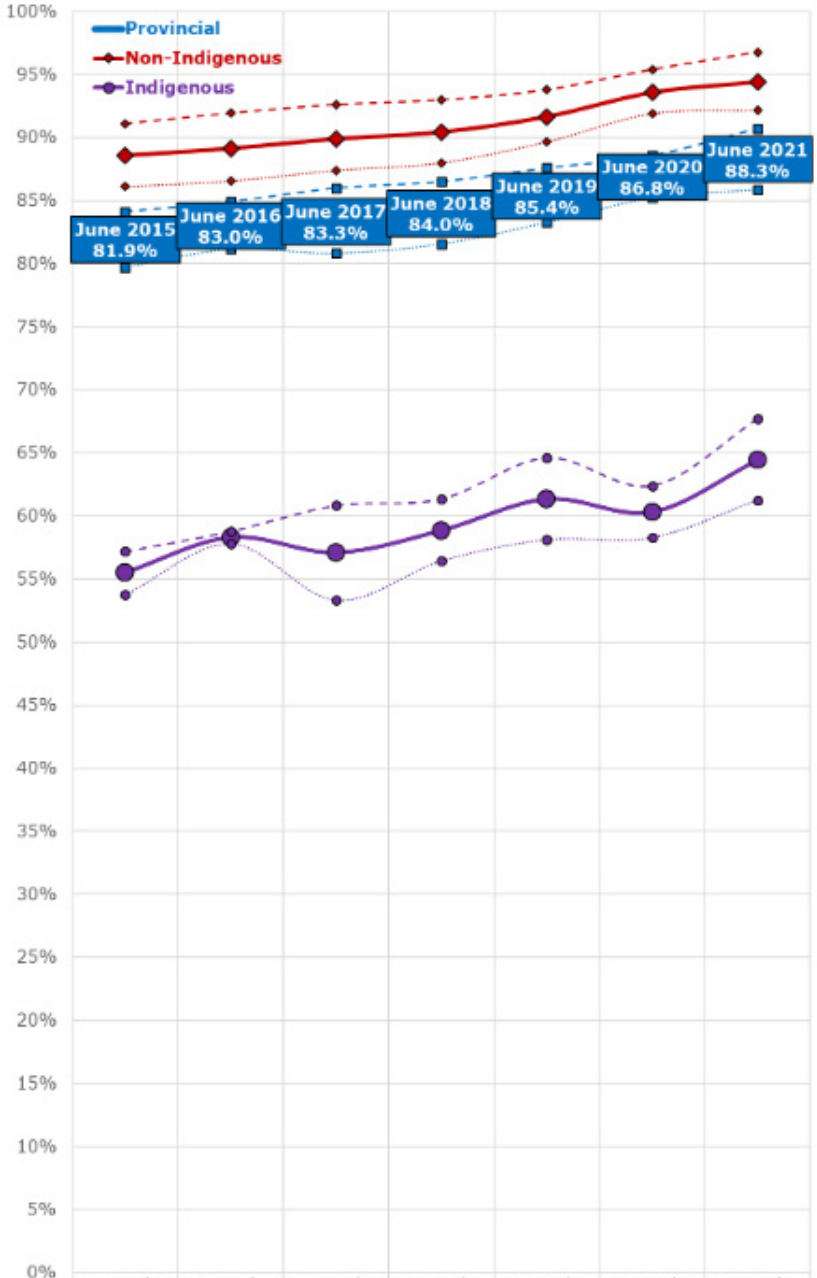
	September 2009 cohort	September 2010 cohort	September 2011 cohort	September 2012 cohort	September 2013 cohort	September 2014 cohort	September 2015 cohort	September 2016 cohort	September 2017 cohort
Provincial	76.2%	77.2%	77.3%	78.1%	79.0%	79.9%	81.9%	82.6%	83.0%
Girls	79.0%	79.7%	80.3%	81.2%	81.8%	82.4%	84.9%	84.6%	85.5%
Boys	73.4%	74.9%	74.6%	75.2%	76.4%	77.6%	78.9%	80.7%	80.6%
Non-Indigenous	83.5%	84.7%	85.3%	86.0%	86.8%	87.9%	89.9%	90.8%	91.3%
Non-Indigenous girls	86.9%	88.2%	88.6%	89.2%	89.6%	90.6%	93.2%	92.9%	94.1%
Non-Indigenous boys	80.3%	81.4%	82.2%	82.8%	84.1%	85.4%	86.8%	89.0%	88.8%
Indigenous	46.9%	47.2%	45.7%	47.4%	49.4%	48.5%	50.7%	50.9%	51.1%
Indigenous girls	48.8%	47.9%	48.8%	49.9%	52.7%	51.2%	53.6%	54.9%	54.1%
Indigenous boys	45.0%	46.6%	42.5%	45.1%	46.1%	45.9%	47.7%	46.7%	48.2%

Five Year High School Graduation Rates



	September 2009 cohort	September 2010 cohort	September 2011 cohort	September 2012 cohort	September 2013 cohort	September 2014 cohort	September 2015 cohort	September 2016 cohort
Provincial	80.4%	81.5%	81.4%	82.4%	83.1%	85.1%	86.4%	86.5%
Girls	82.9%	83.5%	84.1%	85.0%	85.3%	86.9%	89.0%	87.9%
Boys	78.1%	79.7%	78.9%	79.8%	81.0%	83.5%	83.9%	85.1%
Non-Indigenous	87.4%	88.2%	88.5%	89.4%	89.9%	92.3%	93.2%	93.7%
Non-Indigenous girls	90.2%	91.0%	91.4%	92.0%	92.1%	94.2%	95.7%	95.3%
Non-Indigenous boys	84.7%	85.6%	85.9%	86.8%	87.8%	90.5%	90.7%	92.3%
Indigenous	52.7%	54.8%	52.9%	55.1%	57.1%	56.9%	60.3%	58.6%
Indigenous girls	54.4%	55.2%	56.5%	57.7%	60.0%	59.1%	63.6%	61.5%
Indigenous boys	51.0%	54.3%	49.4%	52.5%	54.3%	54.8%	57.1%	55.7%

Six Year High School Graduation Rates



	September 2009 cohort	September 2010 cohort	September 2011 cohort	September 2012 cohort	September 2013 cohort	September 2014 cohort	September 2015 cohort
Provincial	81.9%	83.0%	83.3%	84.0%	85.4%	86.8%	88.3%
Girls	84.1%	84.9%	86.0%	86.5%	87.6%	88.6%	90.7%
Boys	79.7%	81.1%	80.8%	81.6%	83.3%	85.2%	85.9%
Non-Indigenous	88.6%	89.1%	89.9%	90.4%	91.7%	93.6%	94.4%
Non-Indigenous girls	91.1%	91.9%	92.6%	93.0%	93.8%	95.4%	96.8%
Non-Indigenous boys	86.1%	86.6%	87.4%	88.0%	89.7%	91.9%	92.2%
Indigenous	55.5%	58.3%	57.1%	58.8%	61.3%	60.3%	64.4%
Indigenous girls	57.2%	58.8%	60.8%	61.3%	64.6%	62.4%	67.7%
Indigenous boys	53.8%	57.8%	53.3%	56.4%	58.1%	58.3%	61.2%

Non-Indigenous people do require an increased knowledge of the deep historical context for these disparities. The lack of historical knowledge has consequences for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and for Canada as a whole. Manitoba's *Indigenous Education Policy Framework* (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, 2022) is a tool to support education on the history of colonization and ways of knowing, being, and doing for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples.

> **"Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians."**
>
> *– Principles of Reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2019)*

Work Underway

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning is committed to working collaboratively with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leadership, organizations, and communities to improve outcomes and provide high-quality education that meets the needs of all students.

The Indigenous Inclusion Directorate within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning provides leadership and co-ordination for initiatives in Indigenous education and training, such as the following:

- creating resources to support education about our true history, including residential schools and treaty education
- providing cultural and anti-racism workshops to schools, parents, educators, post-secondary institutions, government departments, and community organizations
- coordinating of *A Journey from Cultural Awareness to Cultural Competency* training to school divisions and to First Nations schools, in partnership with Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre
- promoting and participating in Indigenous-focused research
- coordinating sessions with education and Indigenous stakeholders regarding Indigenous education and training policy directions
- providing grants for the Building Student Success with Indigenous Parents (BSSIP) and the Community Schools Program
- launching the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative, which was expanded in 2022 to provide funding to all school divisions and districts

In 2022, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning launched *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*. The framework supports an Indigenous-inclusive environment with holistic achievements of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners by assisting educators as they incorporate Indigenous languages, cultures, and identities into their teaching and practices. The framework is based on the following four strategies:

- authentic involvement
- putting students at the centre
- understanding of worldviews, values, identities, traditions, and contemporary lifestyles
- creating an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment

This framework has been very well received and recent training and consultations have led to a new toolkit that will be released shortly. This is also being applied to early learning and child care.

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning also expanded funding to $2.2 million for Elder and Knowledge Keepers in all school divisions across the province. This programming supports students, educators, and families to learn First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, traditional values, languages, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge systems across all learning environments. A symposium highlighting the success of this initiative has held in 2022 and the momentum is growing.

Recommendation: Ensure an Indigenous-inclusive education system that is reflected across the curriculum, programming, policy, and education workforce.

- Prioritize recruitment and retention efforts to increase the number of Indigenous teachers and teachers of Indigenous languages. This should include partnerships and planning with post-secondary institutions.
- Expand initiatives that support traditional Indigenous knowledge systems for Indigenous youth, such as
  - Indigenous Graduation Coach programs
  - cultural advisors
  - Indigenous language immersion programs (K to 12)
- Develop additional curriculum and credit options (K–12) prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing, and learning, including ceremony. This includes treaty education and land-based education, as reflected in the *Indigenous Education Policy Framework*. At the high school level, these courses should be implemented for credit.
- Establish mobility agreements and partner with First Nations communities to develop a single provincial student information system to support Indigenous students in receiving a high-quality education wherever they attend school.

- Continue to support and fund the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative to ensure adequate funding and longevity of the initiative.
- Develop an approach to implement Indigenous languages courses (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) for high school credit in collaboration with the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy (MALS) group.
- Continue to report on four- and six-year graduation rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the annual report, as this reinforces multiple pathways for success. Data should be used to inform school-level planning and equitable resource allocation.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Building Student Success with Indigenous Parents (BSSIP)	The Building Student Success with Indigenous Parents (BSSIP) initiative is designed to enhance Indigenous parents' involvement in the education of their children. Many BSSIP activities specifically target Indigenous parent-school relationships and communication. BSSIP funding has assisted schools in developing partnerships and programs with parents and the community, which have contributed to the educational success of Indigenous students. There are currently 38 BSSIP projects in 18 school divisions across Manitoba.
Indigenous-Inclusive Education: Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative and *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework*	*Mamàhtawisiwin* (mah mah tah wee see win) and the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative help embed Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into classrooms. As *Mamàhtawisiwin* grounds all of our work across the education system, it supports the holistic achievements of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners by assisting educators in incorporating Indigenous teachings, languages, and cultures into their own teaching. The Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative pilots have been launched in 33 sites in 11 school divisions.
Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant	The **Indigenous Academic Achievement Grant** is distributed to 37 school divisions to help provide programming with a particular focus on strengthening the literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous students and embedding Indigenous perspectives and cultural knowledge into the curricula, the classroom, and school activities. Divisions use the grant to support staffing and resources for teachers and students.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Martin Family Initiative (AYEP)	**Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP)** is designed to improve students' proficiency in business mathematics, English, account marketing, and information and communications technology with the larger purpose of improving graduation rates. A two-credit Grade 11 and Grade 12 curriculum contains Indigenous content, including case studies, teaching strategies, and examples of successful Canadian Indigenous business leaders. The department supports four AYEP projects at Children of the Earth and Gordon Bell high schools in the Winnipeg School Division, Grand Rapids School in the Frontier School Division, and Major Pratt School in partnership with Waywayseecappo First Nation in the Park West School Division.
Model School Literacy Project	The **Model School Literacy Project at Waywayseecappo First Nation School (K–8)** in the Park West School Division, established in 2016, provides continuous, intensive, onsite professional learning to participating teachers with an emphasis on increasing expectations for students and teachers in the following areas: teaching oral language, reading and writing, and using assessment to inform teaching. Funding helps to cover the salaries of the research team members, educational technology, and classroom instructional resources.
Waywayseecappo Park West Partnership Agreement	In 2010, Waywayseecappo First Nation and Park West School Division first entered into a partnership agreement. The education agreement was renewed for the next four years effective July 1, 2022. Key priorities include a focus on Indigenous languages, cultures, ways of knowing, and the real history of Indigenous Peoples.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Graduation Initiatives	**Nutana Collegiate (Saskatoon, SK)** A unique community high school where students, staff, and community partners work together. Additionally, Nutana provides upgrading for mature students ages 18 to 21, career and experiential learning, community engagement, tourism courses, career counselling, and summer school. Many onsite student services that are typically not available include day care, a student-parent support centre, mental health and addictions outreach, and a community coordinator. **Morningstar, R.B. Russell Vocational High School (Winnipeg, MB)** This Winnipeg program is modelled after Nutana Collegiate—an innovative network of student and family support systems that empower students to succeed and graduate. The partnering of services strengthen outcomes for students and their families. The program provides wraparound services for youth who require multi-system support through access to an onsite mental health support worker, school psychologist, tutoring support, and an addictions counsellor. Partnerships include but are not limited to the Manitoba government, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Winnipeg Police, and Employment Income Assistance.
Indigenous Graduation Initiative	**Braided Journeys, Graduation Program (Edmonton Catholic School Board)** A program/student support centre that assists Indigenous students by cultivating a caring, welcoming, and positive place where youth see themselves, their contributions, and their culture represented, respected, and celebrated. Each centre offers academic services support, cultural learning, career development, leadership skills, transition supports, encouragement, and guidance throughout the student's educational journey. Braided Journeys programming supports First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth to become leaders of character, vision, and action.
School Models	Winnipeg School Division established Children of the Earth High School and Niji Mahkwa School in 1991 and 1993, respectively. The programs offer a curriculum based on Indigenous cultures and languages (i.e., Cree, Ojibway).

7. Supports for Children in Care

What We Heard

Students who self-identified as being children in care in the high school student survey highlighted the need for additional support from trusted adults, increased life skills learning and school stability, and preserving Indigenous cultures and identities. Changes to Child and Family Services (CFS) were brought forward, including more say for kids in their living arrangements, less apprehension, more sensitivity training for workers, and more consistency with supports. Students and stakeholders indicated that frequent school moves affected attendance and the ability to do well in school.

> **"When removing kids from their parents, ensure that they can stay in their school and in their community."**
>
> *– in-person session, rural region*

Students asked for additional support from teachers and educational assistants to help with homework and to understand topics discussed in class. Students also emphasized the importance of learning life skills such as financial literacy, management, and administrative skills development to be well prepared for adulthood. They advised that the success of the transition to adulthood depends on their life skills development and that there should be consideration made for increasing the age for young adults aging out of care.

Indigenous students in care also emphasized the importance of preserving Indigenous cultures and identities.

> **"We need to ensure that cultural teachings and ceremonies from a trusted and respected and recognized Elder or cultural teacher are provided to children in care."**
>
> *– student survey, northern region*

What the Research Says

Poverty remains a significant factor for child placement in foster care. Historical and colonial policies continue to systematically separate Indigenous children from their families, communities, languages, and cultures. Canada has high rates (more than 1 percent) of taking children into care. Although apprehension rates have been reduced in recent years, Manitoba's rates (2.4 percent) are particularly high (Brownell et al., 2015). It is also important to note that child welfare in Canada has an over representation of Indigenous children and youth. Children in care and youth living in poverty are overrepresented in the youth justice system.

Children who have been taken into the care of CFS generally experience poorer educational outcomes than students who have not been in care. The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy found 10 percent of students in care passed the provincial English language arts exam and 33 percent graduated from high school (Brownell et al., 2015).

According to the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (2015), children in care have poorer outcomes in each of the following measures:

- Early Development Index (EDI)
- Grade 3 provincial reading and numeracy assessments
- Grade 7 provincial mathematics assessment
- Grade 8 provincial reading and writing assessment
- number of credits earned in Grade 9
- Grade 12 language arts and mathematics provincial standards tests
- high school graduation

Furthermore, children and youth with increased mobility during the school year may experience increased stress and less educational and social success. Many children in care have numerous transitions among homes, schools, and systems. These transitions are emotionally disruptive and may demand that children interface with systems that involve different bureaucratic expectations, terminologies, and limitations" (Brownell et al., 2015).

In addition, when children in care leave rural communities, "every effort [should] be made to reduce child placements that might be unnecessarily traumatic for the children—for example, moving them from urban to rural environments where cultural connections, belonging, or important social connections may be lost" (Brownell et al., 2015).

When children in care age out of CFS, they are more likely to face life challenges, with increased barriers to educational achievement relative to their peers, barriers to employment, and other barriers that have an impact on housing and/or homelessness, including income supports (Brownell et al., 2015). Additionally, when aging out of care, many urban First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth find themselves in urban settings disconnected from their own cultures and languages, with no housing or services in place to support them and most often limited education (Chateau et al., 2018).

Work Underway

The Child and Family Services Act was amended in 2018 to ensure that no child is found to be in need of protection solely as a result of the economic or social situation of the child's parent or guardian. Transition plans are developed for children in care at age 15 to prepare the child to have the skills and knowledge to become independent, including post-secondary education, training opportunities, and funding sources. An Extension of Care agreement may be applied until age 21 if a youth in care meets the criteria when they age out of care at age 18.

Recommendation: Enhance the well-being of children in care who live in poverty, including a focus on ensuring service coordination and cultural supports.

- Ensure children in care have barrier-free access to the resources they need to attend and be successful in school, using the child-first approach reflected in Jordan's Principle.
- Improve information sharing and communication among CFS, agencies, social workers, Indigenous governing bodies, and school divisions. The development of a provincial student information system will support this (currently underway).
- Provide access to school community and family rooms for family visits to support the reunification of children in care.
- Revise policy to support children in care through the "one school, one year" model, regardless of what supports are being received (including transportation).
- Implement children-in-care liaisons or outreach workers to bridge a gap between home and school.
- Increase awareness of the tuition waiver program in Manitoba through the creation of a centralized website for resources available to students in care (using https://agedout.com as a notable example).
- Explore further development of cultural supports and opportunities specific to Indigenous children in care in connection with the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Manitoba Poverty Reduction Strategy Key Initiatives	The Manitoba government responds to reports and recommendations from the Advocate for Children and Youth, Commissioner Ted Hughes following the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, the Child Welfare Legislative Review Committee, Indigenous organizations, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.
River East Transcona School Division—Children in Care Strategy	RETSD is piloting a Children in Care Strategy to operationalize recommendations from the Manitoba Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Children in Care (2016) in two schools. The pilot strategy/program aims to ■ create a sense of belonging and voice for children in care and their families ■ enhance communication between schools and community agencies ■ increase staff learning regarding issues related to children in care
Tuition Waiver Program	The tuition waiver provides an opportunity for current and former youth in CFS care in Manitoba to attend post-secondary education. ■ **Futures Forward** offers accessible services and transitional supports for current and former youth in care, assisting youth ages 15 to 29 in the areas of mental health, housing, employment, education, and financial counselling.
First Nations Family Advocate	The First Nations Family Advocate Office provides support and advocacy to First Nations families that are involved with the CFS system. They challenge existing systems using First Nations knowledge, laws, traditions, and belief systems to create positive change for First Nations children and families and work to bring more children currently in the system back to their home communities.
Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY)	*The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* states it is the responsibility of the Manitoba Advocate to support, assist, inform, and advise children, young adults, and their families respecting designated services, including child welfare, adoption, disabilities, education, mental health, addictions, victim supports, and justice.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Fearless R2W	Fearless R2W is a non-profit organization that serves parents working to reunify with their children and youth who are aging out of care. Opportunities are provided for learning about child welfare in Manitoba, building community, and providing advocacy when possible.
Children in Care Committee	In 2019, the Winnipeg School Division established a Children in Care Committee. Membership represents staff from multiple departments with the purpose of addressing key action areas (i.e., academic supports, school connectedness, clinical intervention, and professional development). The committee will also assist in supporting specific children and families in navigating systems beyond the school division.

8. Intersectoral Approach/Holistic Supports

What We Heard

During the engagement sessions, stakeholders highlighted that students living in poverty are facing complex and intersectional challenges that require holistic and creative solutions. They also cited concerns around homelessness, low-income assistance benefits, overcrowded housing, and the high cost of living, particularly in northern communities. Students expressed concern around access to resources due to geographic isolation and the poverty that stems from it. Additional supports for students and families in the North were identified as needed.

Stakeholders indicated that centralizing services in accessible locations can mitigate some of the barriers that prevent families from accessing services, such as food, housing, safe spaces to go, technology, mental health supports, employment supports, and support for accessing government resources such as photo identification and driver's licences.

> **"We want to try and tackle some of the barriers and some of the challenges that children and youth living in poverty face. It really has to be wraparound supports within schools. I think schools are the perfect place though to sort of be the hub of those supports because all kids go to school, or most kids go to school. It's the system that most kids are involved in."**
>
> *– virtual stakeholder session*

The notion of "community" was a common theme raised by participants throughout the process, with several perspectives taken. One is the idea that schools must serve as "hubs" where a variety of services can be accessed by families and students. Schools are generally seen as safe places with familiarity and close proximity, which makes them ideal places to provide support. Examples of the main services that participants stated they would like to see improved include, but are not limited to, the availability of nurses, addictions workers, tax clinics, after-school programs, cultural events, and summer programs.

In a more philosophical sense, community is required in a holistic way to ensure that children and their families have all of the support they need to work through the challenges associated with poverty. This means the involvement of several key stakeholders, including schools, school divisions, government departments, Elders, not-for-profits (e.g., those assisting in providing food, shelter, mental health), health services, restorative justice officials, and mentors.

What the Research Says

Holistic perspectives incorporate an understanding of all the forces that shape inequalities (Feagin and Sikes, 1994). Poverty and social determinants of health are interconnected. It is useful to consider the social determinants of health when analyzing solutions to poverty in order to understand the complex causes of poverty and the implications for the health of individuals and communities. Understanding the effects and deep roots of poverty makes way for the development of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to poverty alleviation.

By understanding the social determinants of health and intersectionality, we are better able to understand the overlapping barriers for children and youth living in poverty. Social determinants of health are the range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that determine individual and population health. Experiences of discrimination, racism, and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and Black Canadians.

There is a growing recognition that a holistic approach is highly effective in supporting students who live in poverty (Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). This approach may address complicated and interdependent challenges and require intersectoral collaboration. Schools as community hubs could provide an effective framework for this collaboration and offer a wide range of services beyond education to improve the outcomes of students living in poverty (Haig, 2014). The pillars of success of the school as a community hub model are integrated student services, extended learning time and opportunities before and after the school day and over the summer, collaborative leadership, and family and community engagement (Maier et al., 2017).

Work Underway

Manitoba's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Manitoba Finance, 2018) recognizes that poverty reduction is complex. **"The expertise of our cross-sectoral partners is fundamental to working together to improve outcomes for vulnerable Manitobans"** (p. 48).

The Community Schools Program is an example of the holistic nature of the work. The program was developed under *The Community Schools Act* in 2012 and aims to deploy school-community services and resources to improve outcomes for students in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. There are currently 36 schools participating in the Community Schools Program. Consideration is being given to expanding this program to benefit more students and families.

There is also work underway provincially to strengthen parent engagement and expand the philosophy of community education, as recommended by the Commission on K to 12 Education.

Recommendation: Provide holistic services and supports for students living in poverty.

- Explore partnerships among government, school divisions, and community organizations to ensure the accessibility of services for students living in poverty.
  - One model for exploration could be schools as community hubs. This would require a conceptual framework, policies, and guidelines.
  - Increase health services and resources for students living in poverty through collaboration among government, school divisions, and community organizations (e.g., WRHA, NRHA, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Manitoba Housing, and more).
- Provide high-quality education through interdepartmental collaboration for youth who are incarcerated.
- Continue to develop and implement the provincial attendance strategy and policy framework.
  - Consider parent-student outreach coordinators/liaisons for students who attend schools and live in communities experiencing high poverty.
  - Cease the use of withdrawal as a response to poor attendance.
  - Ensure ongoing school programming for students who are experiencing barriers to attendance.
- Expand the Community Schools Program to include additional schools within high-poverty communities.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
COACH Program	A community-based treatment program that provides emotional, behavioural, and academic wraparound intervention and support for students. Students learn about the needs that drive their behaviour and are offered social skills training to improve their social skills, resulting in improved behaviours. (Winnipeg School Division in partnership with the Manitoba government)

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives

Community Schools Program

The **Community Schools Program (CSP)**, launched in 2005, supports the capacity of schools as hubs within communities to strategically gather and deploy school-community services and resources in ways that attain better outcomes for students, families, and neighbourhoods—particularly those contending with concentrated disadvantages.

CSP funding helps to leverage additional supports and resources from a wide range of stakeholders and organizations. Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning will continue to work collaboratively with other government departments, community agencies, foundations, and the corporate sector to enhance family and child well-being, promote parental mental/emotional health, strengthen student and family learning opportunities and student success, and reduce the number of children in care. CSP funding allows for the following:

- focus on education—student achievement and well-being
- extended hours and expanded opportunities (summer programming)
- designated staff person (e.g., community liaison, community support worker, or community connector*) assigned to develop partnerships and mobilize resources.

School principal leadership is critical for the success of CSP community schools.

Examples:

- parenting classes
- traditional parenting
- pre-school/parent child centres (Wiggle, Giggle Munch, Rhyme Time)
- walking school bus
- home visits
- Frontier College summer literacy programs
- mental health promotion initiatives (Handle with Care)
- Thrival Kits™
- mindfulness training
- first aid/CPR training

* Schools that receive program funding are required by legislation to assign an employee of the division or district to act as a community liaison, community connector, or community support worker. Their role includes coordinating programs and making connections within the communities.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Parent-Child Centres	**Parent-child programs** are a component of the Community Schools Program (CSP) of Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, supporting low socio-economic neighborhoods. Parent support workers provide opportunities for culturally appropriate, quality early learning experiences to build healthy child development through the core activities of positive parenting, nutrition and physical health, learning and literacy, and community capacity building. Examples: ■ parent support worker salaries and school family room materials in two Winnipeg School Division sites: Shaughnessy Community School and Dufferin Community School ■ Flin Flon School Division site: Ruth Betts Community School ■ Frontier School Division site: Grand Rapids Community School
Family Outreach Coordinators	**The Family Outreach Coordinator Initiative** in community schools enhances capacity for the active engagement of parents/families in the education of their children, with a particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged, marginalized families/parents in a school community across a cluster of three community schools. The grant supports the cost of two coordinators that are located in the Louis Riel School Division. One works across Lavallee, Victor Mager, and Victor H. L. Wyatt schools; the other coordinator is located in the Mystery Lake School District and works across Wapanohk School, Juniper School, and R. D. Parker Collegiate.
William Whyte School, Winnipeg School Division	The program supports pre-school students' school readiness skills in the community through a literacy program, improves food insecurity and nutrition through the provision of hampers and the creation of a community garden, supports families in being connected with other needed resources, and works to improve attendance. The project employs two community workers who work within the William Whyte School to assist in bridging the home-school connection.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Community Mobilization	Manitoba has several community mobilization models addressing community safety and well-being. As referenced in the Criminal Justice System Modernization Strategy (Manitoba Justice, 2018), the Manitoba government is committed to multi-sector collaborative approaches that include community organizations, law enforcement, schools, and government services. This innovative approach includes the development of the collaborative Manitoba Community Mobilization and Safety Initiatives Network for the promotion and strategic alignment of Manitoba multi-agency community safety projects. Examples: ■ Block by Block (Thunderwing)—Winnipeg ■ commUNITY—Altona ■ Community Care Program—Winkler ■ Dauphin At-Risk Teens (DART)—Dauphin ■ Families and Youth Resource Support Team (FYRST)—Gimli ■ Headway—Steinbach ■ Portage Hub—Portage la Prairie ■ Selkirk Team for At-Risk Teens (START)—Selkirk ■ Southwest Teens At-Risk (STAR)—Stonewall ■ Swan Valley Hub—Swan River ■ Thompson Hub—Thompson ■ Westman Hub—Brandon
Education Programming Operated by Community Care Providers	■ **Transition, Education, and Resources for Females**—A transition, healing, and education program for children, youth, adults, and transgender individuals who have been exploited/trafficked through the sex trade. This initiative provides school credits for youth and adult participants. (Winnipeg School Division/New Directions) ■ **Restoring the Sacred** is an after-school peer mentorship program for Indigenous youth who are transitioning from rural and/or northern communities to attend school in Winnipeg. The program supports young learners by providing a culturally safe environment where youth can develop positive relationships, enhance their life skills, and participate in social and cultural activities focused on developing healthy, happy, resilient, and motivated youth leaders and achievers. (Ka Ni Kanichihk)

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives

Education Programming Operated by Community Care Providers (continued)

- **Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc. (Ndinawe)**—A not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping at-risk youth in Winnipeg. Ndinawe offers integrated services connecting vulnerable children and youth aged 11–17 with the shelter, culture, recreation, education, outreach, and support they need for safe and healthy lives.
- **MaMawi Yellow Shawl program**—Designed to support youth who had to leave their home communities to attend high school in Winnipeg. It continues to offer a holistic approach that includes supported housing and resources that guide youth to complete Grade 12, advance to secondary education, or seek employment. (Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre)
- **Pathways to Education Winnipeg**—A community-based program with locations across Canada to help students reach their full potential through academic achievement, high school graduation, and post-secondary opportunities. In Winnipeg, Pathways to Education partners with the Community Education Development Association (CEDA) (see cedawpg.org).
- **Building Bridges/Breaking Barriers**—An intergenerational learning and relationship-based program that prioritizes Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community leaders, and peers. The program brings youth together from a variety of communities, backgrounds, and cultures to explore concepts related to oppression, building awareness of inequities in our society, and truth and reconciliation. It involves peer mentorship and youth leadership development.
- **Inner City Youth Alive (ICYA)**—Located in the North End of Winnipeg, ICYA's vision is to make a difference in the lives of inner city youth by providing a safe, active, and nurturing environment for children and youth. They committed themselves to the youth and gave their time as volunteers through wilderness camping trips and by teaching them woodworking skills.

Spotlight on Programs and Initiatives	
Extra-curricular	Many school divisions and community organizations offer co-curricular and extra-curricular programming, including but not limited to the following: ■ Boys and Girls Club of Canada ■ City of Winnipeg Community Centres ■ Rec & Read ■ Spirit North ■ Career Trek ■ Connected North ■ CEDA Pathways ■ Partnerships with Friendship Centres

9. Equity in Education

What We Heard

Calls for equity in education spanning topics of race, socio-economic status, and children in care exist across many spaces and documents—globally, federally, and provincially. A shared understanding of equity in education and its impact on students, families, and community is required among stakeholders and systems to ensure equity in staffing, funding, program and policy development, implementation, and decision making.

The Manitoba Chief Provincial Public Health Officer Position Statement on Health Equity (Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living, 2018) defines equity and affirms shared responsibilities.

A similar shared understanding of equity in education should be developed across the education system. The development of this shared understanding is required to provide a common perspective among all involved as the basis for a positive shift in this work.

What the Research Says

Equity in education is complex, multifaceted, and necessary to ensure student access to (and success within) Manitoba schools. Considerations for systemic improvements to equity in education need to include both policy and process.

One of the first steps toward achieving educational equity is to recognize that equity is an ongoing, collaborative journey. The leaders of an equity initiative, which may include district administrators, faculty and staff, families, students, community members, and policy makers, should all fully commit to the efforts, changes, and complexities that accompany the creation of an equitable system (McGraw Hill, 2019).

Ontario has adopted an Education Equity Action Plan (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017) based on "the lead by example" principle. It makes organizational culture change at the ministerial level to ensure equity in ministry structures, policies, programs, and practices. Specifically, this action plan identifies four priority areas to achieve the goal of "ensuring equity" by eliminating discrimination, barriers, and bias from schools, classrooms, divisions, and the Ministry of Education, to ensure the success for all students.

British Columbia has engaged its districts of education in the Equity in Action Project, 2019–2020 (British Columbia Education and Training, 2022). The ultimate objective is to create equity of opportunity and to address systemic barriers affecting Indigenous students through a co-constructive approach. Within this approach, the districts' equity teams are leading a five-step process, starting from building an equity scan dashboard and ending with elaborating a theory of change for their districts. Currently, all districts have equity scan dashboards and 32 districts are engaging in the project.

Work Underway

Manitoba's *Indigenous Education Policy Framework* defines equity as "a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. For treatment to be fair, issues of diversity need to be taken into account so that different needs and requirements or individuals are met. As a concept underlying social and educational perspectives, it takes into consideration the existence of systemic obstacles and social inequalities, and proposes policies and practices to counter them, thereby providing all individuals and groups the possibility of educational success, employment, and social mobility."

Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan puts equity at the centre of its vision statement that all students succeed, includes equity as a foundational principle, and includes many actions that will ensure more equity across Manitoba. One example is the new online high school that will bring online and offline learning opportunities to those who need them. Another is the workforce planning work that seeks to increase the number of Indigenous staff across the sector. Expanding the Community Schools Program and advancing work to support presence and engagement are a few other examples.

A new funding model for Kindergarten to Grade 12 education in Manitoba is being developed to create a system of fair and sustainable funding for schools, providing more opportunities and supports for all students in Manitoba, no matter where they live. Recent funding announcements at the provincial level have focused on equity and there are some school divisions that are embracing this approach.

Recommendation: Apply an equity lens to planning at the school, division, and provincial levels.

- Government and school divisions support a shared understanding of equity, as developed by stakeholders and the community. This shared definition should affect decision making at all levels (e.g., funding, policy, priorities).
- Explore an Education Equity Impact Assessment for use in Manitoba, such as the Ontario Ministry of Health's Health Equity Impact Assessment model (2022).
- Develop or amend school division policy to prioritize equitable decision making for all resources (e.g., staffing, programming, resources, and budget).
- Identify the schools and communities with the highest needs based on socio-economic indicators (at the school division level) to prioritize actions for implementation (e.g., decision making, strategic planning, funding). Additional indicators should be considered (e.g., children in care).
- When allocating funding to school divisions across Manitoba, implement an equitable funding model that considers factors such as communities with high poverty, students who are in care, and students with different needs.

Conclusion

The task force members have been invaluable in advancing this priority work through their tremendous contributions. They have identified many intersectoral practices already happening in Manitoba and that collaborative actions and solutions are needed for the best outcomes for the children who need them the most.

We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to the hundreds of students and community members who took the time to participate in the engagement sessions and high school student survey. Hearing the voices of those who are most directly affected by poverty was the most valuable part of this work.

All educational partners are called upon to review this report and examine opportunities to collaboratively implement strategies at the classroom, school, community, and organizational levels to reduce the impacts of poverty on education. This report will be discussed with relevant government bodies and stakeholders to share information captured in the recommendations. The report will also be shared with the Poverty Reduction Committee of Cabinet, as specified in the Terms of Reference.

Appendix A: Poverty and Education Task Force Terms of Reference

POVERTY AND EDUCATION TASK FORCE
TERMS OF REFERENCE

MANDATE

The Manitoba Commission for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education recommended many key action items for an improved education system to support student success and well-being. The Government of Manitoba has committed to implementing many of these recommendations, including the establishment of the Poverty and Education Task Force, launched September 2021.

The Poverty and Education Task Force, in connection with the Poverty Reduction Strategy, will examine the linkages between poverty and education, and will support the implementation of strategies to improve social inclusion, educational, and well-being outcomes for all students, particularly those who are living with low income. The task force brings together intersectoral partners to form joint solutions.

MEMBERSHIP

The Deputy Minister and a member of the Poverty Reduction Committee will co-chair the task force. The task force will be composed of up to 25 members.

Selected through a targeted direct outreach, members will include key stakeholders who have expertise on issues related to poverty and/or education and who can develop recommendations that address the impact of poverty on student outcomes and success.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The key responsibilities of this task force are

- to identify and acknowledge the relationship that exists between poverty and education in Manitoba
- to put forth actionable and informed recommendations at the classroom, school, divisional, and community level to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning to be shared with the Committee of Cabinet, that will improve the educational experiences, outcomes and well-being of students in Manitoba

Manitoba

The task force will focus on the needs of children, youth, and community, and the recommendations will focus on the impacts of poverty on learning and well-being. Larger systemic issues impacting community will be noted as part of the findings.

Areas of initial focus identified from the Manitoba Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education for the task force include the following:

- food access and security
- access to technology, transportation, and other socio-economic barriers that impact participation
- outcomes and continuity of education for children in care

MEETINGS

The task force will operate for approximately 18 months, at which point its activities will be reviewed to determine whether it will conclude, be extended, or renewed.

The task force shall hold meetings at the call of the co-chairs. It is anticipated that virtual meetings will be held bi-monthly. The schedule may change from time to time in order to meet the work plan and accomplish the tasks as outlined.

Appendix B: Engagements with Boivin Communication Group and Project Team

In-Person Engagement Sessions

NORTHERN

- The Pas, community centre, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Dauphin, community centre, youth session, Grades 9–12
- K–12 school on reserve, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Youth session, Grades 9–12, with students from the following communities:
  - Waboden
  - Hollow Water First Nation
  - Norway House Cree Nation
  - Pine Creek First Nation

RURAL

- Portage la Prairie, community centre, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Brandon, community centre, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Pine Falls, K–12 school, youth session, Grades 9–12

WINNIPEG

- Inner city, community organization supporting graduation, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Inner city, community-based mentorship and outreach program, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Inner city, Indigenous non-profit organization, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Inner city, after-school program, youth session, Grades 9–12
- Inner city, community organization supporting at-risk Indigenous youth and families, youth session, ages 16–21

Virtual Stakeholder Engagement Session Participants

- Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg
- Breakfast Club of Canada
- BUILD Winnipeg
- Canadian Feed the Children
- Canadian Mental Health Authority
- Career Trek
- CEDA Pathways
- Children of the Earth High School
- City of Winnipeg—Community Development Division
- City of Winnipeg—Poverty Reduction Strategy, Indigenous Helpers Society
- Community Education Development Association
- Council of School Leaders (COSL)
- Fearless R2W
- First Nations Child and Family Advocate
- Food Matters
- Growcer, and Alberta school principal using Growcer
- Indigenous Inclusion Directorate Advisory Council (IIDAC)
- Inner City Youth Alive
- Intersectoral solutions: educators
- Intradepartmental government session
- Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY)
- Manitoba Centre for Health Policy
- Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre
- The Manitoba Teachers' Society
- Minister's Student Advisory Council
- Mount Carmel Clinic
- Ndinawe
- Northern educators: Indigenous perspectives
  - Waterhen and Skownan Schools, Skownan First Nation
  - Frontier Mosakahiken School, Mosakahiken First Nation
  - Minegoziibe Anishinabe School (MAS), Pine Creek First Nation
  - Area 1, Frontier School Division
  - Gillam School
  - Berens River School, Berens River First Nation
  - Duke of Marlborough School, Churchill
  - Cranberry Portage
- Northern Manitoba Food Culture and Community Collaborative
- Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin
- Social Planning Council
- The Pas Friendship Centre (Food Bank Program)
- Winnipeg Harvest

Appendix C: Glossary

Aquaponics: The process of growing food items such as plants in water, in which the waste produced by fish or other water animals provides food for the plants, and the plants keep the water clean (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Colonialism: Usually refers to the period of European colonization and political domination from the 1400s onwards in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and includes the different forms of colonialism involving settler colonies, such as Canada, and non-settler colonies, such as India, during British rule. Colonialism also differs across colonizing nations and across time. For example, French colonialism had different policies from British colonialism, while modern colonialism is often seen as part of "globalization," which includes the exploitation of labour and national resources by transnational corporations and the expansion of free trade agreements and blocs (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, 2022).

Culture: The totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, habits, and the way of life of a group of individuals who share certain historical experiences (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, 2022).

Decolonization: This is the process of taking a critical look at how colonization has affected Indigenous Peoples in Canada and reacting to the history of oppression that Indigenous Peoples have been through (Monkman, 2018).

Discrimination: The unjust or prejudicial treatment of an individual or groups of people; the unequal treatment of groups or individuals with a history of marginalization by a person, group, or institution that, through the denial of certain rights, results in inequality, subordination, and/or deprivation of political, education, social, economic, and cultural rights (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, 2022).

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) defines discrimination as an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age, or disability. These reasons, also called "grounds," are protected under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. In 2008, section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (CHRA) was finally repealed with the passing of an amendment. The revised legislation means that First Nations individuals who are registered Indians and members of bands, or individuals residing or working on reserves, can now make complaints of discrimination to the CHRC relating to decisions or actions arising from, or pursuant to, the *Indian Act*.

Equity: A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. For treatment to be fair, issues of diversity need to be taken into account so that the different needs and requirements of individuals are met. As a concept underlying social and educational perspectives, it takes into consideration the existence of systemic obstacles and social inequalities, and proposes policies and practices to counter them, thereby providing all individuals and groups the possibility of educational success, employment, and social mobility. In equitable terms, educational achievement should be an inclusive rather than an exclusive goal (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin*, 2022).

Food literacy: Food literacy is knowledge, attitudes, and skills about food. This includes understanding the connections among food, health, and well-being; knowing how to select nutritious foods; and understanding what constitutes a healthy diet. Food literacy is about healthy eating, but food is also connected to competencies and concepts in the physical/health education curriculum, as well as in other curriculum areas (Healthy Schools BC, 2023).

Food security: Food security is an experience that exists when all people have what they need to eat well, all the time. This experience is unique to each person. The food-secure experience differs for everyone because, although we all eat, everyone has different expectations for and relationships with food. We all have unique traditions and customs, favourite ingredients, varying connections to the land and where our food comes from, different financial situations, diverse preferences and physiological needs, different grocery resources, and many other factors (Food Matters Manitoba, 2022).

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." – 1996 World Food Summit (FAO, 1996)

Food sovereignty: Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (Food Secure Canada, 2022).

Indigenous: A collective name referring broadly to peoples whose traditional territories have been affected by displacement and settlement by others. In North America, Indigenous Peoples is the collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. In Canada, it refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin,* 2022).

Intersectional: These are the ways that racism, racial discrimination, harassment, and vilification are frequently linked/shaped/informed by other elements such as sex, gender, and sexuality (Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, 2020).

Intersectoral: Intersectoral collaboration is the joint action taken across government sectors, as well as by community representatives from private, voluntary, and non-profit groups, to improve the overall health and wellness of individuals, families, and communities (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2016).

Jordan's Principle: Jordan's Principle is a child-first principle to ensure First Nations children get the services they need. It is a legal rule named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. Born with complex medical needs, Jordan spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital, waiting to leave, while governments argued over who should pay for his at-home care—care that would have been paid for immediately had Jordan not been First Nations. Jordan died in the hospital at the age of five years old, never having spent a day in a family home. With the support of their community of Norway House Cree Nation and others, Jordan's family gifted his name to the creation of a child-first principle to ensure First Nations children could access the services they need without denial, delay, or disruption (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, n.d.).

Mental health: Mental health and mental illness are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same thing. "Mental health" is a concept similar to "physical health": it refers to a state of well-being. Mental health includes our emotions, feelings of connection to others, our thoughts and feelings, and being able to manage life's highs and lows (CMHA, 2021).

One school, one year: The philosophy that schools can reduce the number of transitions forced upon a child in care by supporting the "one school, one year" model. Should residency or guardianship change in the middle of a school year and the student should move out of the school or division catchment, the student would be permitted to remain enrolled until the end of the year.

Racism: A mix of prejudice and power leading to domination and exploitation by the dominant or majority group over the non-dominant, minoritized, or racialized group. It asserts that the one group is supreme and superior, while the other is inferior. Racism is any individual action or institutional practice backed by institutional power that subordinates people because of their colour or ethnicity.

Social determinants of health: The social determinants of health are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life (Manitoba Mental Health and Community Wellness, 2002).

Socio-economic indicators: Social and economic statistics that measure aspects of development. They can include but aren't limited to employment, education, income, and mobility.

Socio-economic status: Characteristics of economic, social, and physical environments in which individuals live and work, as well as their demographic and genetic characteristics (Max Rady College of Medicine, 2011).

Systemic discrimination: The institutionalization of discrimination through policies and practices that may appear neutral on the surface but have an exclusionary impact on particular groups, such that various minority groups are discriminated against, intentionally or unintentionally. Systemic discrimination operates directly or indirectly to sustain the power structure and advantages enjoyed by the dominant groups. It results in the unequal distribution of economic, social, and political resources and rewards among diverse groups. It also denies diverse peoples access to fully participate in society and creates barriers to education, employment, housing, and other services available to the dominant group. Systemic discrimination may be the result of government policies, laws, and regulations (MEECL, *Mamàhtawisiwin,* 2022).

Systemic racism: Refers to the arrangements and practices that maintain racial hierarchies and racial inequality. It comprises policies, behaviours, and practices that are part of the social, cultural, or administrative elements of an organization and which produce or maintain positions of disadvantage for racialized individuals (Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, 2020).

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