

EVALUATING PATHWAYS PROGRAMS AT BC INSTITUTIONS

*Success, Challenges, and Vision
for the Future*

A Policy Brief
Mark Barnes
University of Northern British Columbia



The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) recently completed a strategic restructuring and revitalization of its youth engagement programs, bringing them together under a single umbrella initiative: the UNBC Youth and Student Engagement Program. This consolidation unified and strengthened the Active Minds and Northern Transitions programs, which were originally designed to make Indigenous students aware of post-secondary options and to prepare them through experiential learning. By aligning these programs, UNBC aimed to leverage cross-institutional connections to address a need identified by Indigenous community partners: assisting Indigenous students with the transition to post-secondary education.

As part of this strategic restructure and revitalization, UNBC conducted an environmental scan of Indigenous pathway programs at UNBC and other post-secondary institutions (PSIs), as well as programs delivered by partner organizations.

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Vice President, Strategy and Outreach at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), Mark offers a detailed look at UNBC's Youth and Student Engagement Program. This program is designed to support Indigenous learners as they explore and shift into post-secondary education.

KEY FINDINGS

The environmental scan produced insights into areas of enhancement within Indigenous youth engagement:

- **Unified, Community-Centric Approach:** Programs that prioritized community involvement, including mentorship and knowledge sharing, provided directly within Indigenous communities showed the greatest effectiveness in building trust, fostering cultural alignment, and encouraging interest in post-secondary education.
- **Enhanced Institutional Support through Centralization:** By unifying Indigenous youth engagement initiatives under one program, UNBC increased resource efficiency, improved communication, and enabled a coordinated approach to expanding Indigenous youth engagement.
- **Collaborative Pathways with Stakeholders:** Programs that involved close collaboration with Indigenous communities, school districts, and PSIs will create smoother segues for Indigenous youth into post-secondary education. This approach will allow for a holistic support system, addressing students' academic, social, cultural, and career needs.
- **Need for Sustainable Resources and Institutional Commitment:** The sustainability of Indigenous youth engagement programs depends on long-term institutional support and dedicated funding. UNBC's centralized Youth and Student Engagement Program demonstrated a commitment to continuity by hiring dedicated staff, enhancing the program's stability and adaptability. This highlights the importance of reliable programming as a foundation for trust-building within Indigenous communities.



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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish Community Connection Points and Dedicated Liaison Roles

- **Community-Based Liaisons:** Indigenous liaison officers were recommended to serve within communities as primary connection points, building direct relationships with Indigenous youth, their families, and educational leaders.
- **On-Campus Indigenous Support:** Staff roles within UNBC, such as Indigenous Student Advisors and Outreach Coordinators, were suggested to manage connections with community partners and support consistent, culturally appropriate engagement.

Deliver Programs Within Indigenous Communities

- **Community-Based Youth Programming:** Bringing aspects of the Active Minds and Northern Transitions programs directly into Indigenous communities was advised to make programs more accessible and culturally relevant.
- **Collaboration with Educational Leaders:** It was recommended to co-design and deliver program content with First Nations educational coordinators and community directors, ensuring alignment with community needs and values.

Strengthen Resource Allocation for Sustainable Program Delivery

- **Increase Funding for Stability:** Consistent funding was recommended to support long-term program development and community-based programming.
- **Professional Development for Staff:** Ongoing training in culturally responsive practices was advised for program staff to enhance their ability to support Indigenous students effectively.
- **Consultation with UNBC Academics:** Collaborating with UNBC faculty to ensure Indigenous youth have access to the training and qualifications needed for post-secondary success while creating pathways that foster a sense of belonging and academic achievement.



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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Embed Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives

- **Incorporate Indigenous Knowledge:** Engaging Elders and knowledge-keepers in program design to integrate Indigenous worldviews was recommended to help Indigenous youth feel connected to the academic environment at UNBC.
- **Create Culturally Safe Spaces:** Ensuring that UNBC's spaces were welcoming and supportive of Indigenous identities was advised to encourage Indigenous youth participation and success.
- **Mentorship through Indigenous Guest Speakers:** It is recommended to include Indigenous guest speakers from various industries and career fields to highlight their contributions, successes, and commitment to giving back to their communities, thereby inspiring and empowering Indigenous youth.

Implement a Long-Term Engagement Strategy

- **Continuous Community Feedback:** Establishing an Indigenous Advisory Council with representatives from Indigenous communities, UNBC staff, and students was suggested to ensure that the Youth and Student Engagement Program remained responsive and relevant.
- **Tracking Program Impact:** A system for assessing program success and refining engagement strategies over time was recommended to demonstrate the program's value and support future funding.