



The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities  
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## News Release

### **Two Schools Launch Aboriginal Education Program**

August 17, 2004, *Edmonton*. Aboriginal students will soon have two more safe and caring schools to attend. Sacred Heart School in Wetaskiwin and Lakedell School in Ma Me O Beach have recently started participating in the *Building Safe, Caring, and Inclusive Schools for Aboriginal Youth* project. “These schools are not just implementing our *Supporting a Safe and Caring School* program, but they will be helping us adapt our *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum* program to increase its effectiveness with Aboriginal students”, said Dr. Vicki Mather, director of the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SACSC).

The purpose of this project is to incorporate Aboriginal elements into the Safe and Caring School resources, while implementing the program in schools with large Aboriginal populations. This will accomplish two main objectives: helping Aboriginals feel safe and comfortable in any school, and promoting positive social values in non-Aboriginal students. Traditional Aboriginal values such as equity, inclusion, and responsibility are similar to and support the positive character building of non-Aboriginal families as well. “Universal kindness is a concept that all children and youth can benefit from learning about”, said Dr. Mather. “This common ground will help Aboriginal and non-aboriginal students respect one-another and become caring human beings.”

Violence has been one of the top youth related issues in Alberta for the last several years. According to Statistics Canada one in ten youth come in contact with the police for violations in the criminal code. Aboriginals are among

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### *Aboriginal Education Add One*

the high risk group for being victims of youth violence. This project will work to reduce students' prejudicial attitudes and beliefs, and decrease discriminatory actions toward Aboriginal people. Some of the key elements in the project include: building youth leadership training for mentorship programs, promoting youth professional development, providing leadership and capacity building activities for adults, and working with colleges and universities to promote educational initiatives that support the previous three.

Sacred Heart and Lakedell represent the second set of schools for this program. The first set of schools, in Wabasca: Mistassiniy, St. Theresa, and Bigstone Community school, are approximately one year into implementation. "We've already seen the positive impact that this program is having on the students, teachers, and the surrounding community" said Dr. Mather "In focus groups, students have told us that there is less bullying and harassment in their schools, and teachers have noticed that students show more respect for their peers and the adults in their lives." Since implementation requires a large commitment of time and energy, SACSC has hired Linda Pelly-Landrie to become a community co-ordinator to work with the two new schools.

Linda Pelly-Landrie has over 25 years of experience working with First Nations, and provincial and federal governments. Her background is in curriculum development, educational facilitation, and project management. "I have both a personal and professional commitment to Aboriginal education", said Pelly-Landrie. "I know that this program will make a positive impact on the educational development of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth."

Justice Canada, specifically the Investment Fund of the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention is funding three years of the *Building Safe, Caring, and Inclusive Schools for Aboriginal Youth* project, which started in 2003.



## Background

The purpose of the *Building Safe, Caring, and Inclusive Schools for Aboriginal Youth* project is to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors among youth. The program does this by: enhancing respect, responsibility, and trust; increasing scholastic achievement and school completion among Aboriginal students; reducing suicide rates among Aboriginal youth; and preventing violence and crime through the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote pro-social behaviour.

The core principles or protective factors are:

- Attachment- or positive social bonds
- Achievement- which encourages fulfilling academic potential
- Autonomy- taking responsibility for behaviour
- Altruism- self worth through helping others.

The core SACSC topics that will be implemented in participating schools are:

1. Building respect and responsibility
2. Building self-esteem
3. Respecting diversity and preventing prejudice
4. Managing anger and dealing with bullying
5. Managing and resolving conflicts peacefully

The values promoted through SACSC character education are acceptable among all cultural and religious groups. SACSC supports the values that parents instil in their children, without being offensive to any of Canada's diverse cultures or religions. These values include respect, inclusiveness, caring, compassion, and responsibility. The program promotes consistency at home and at school, as school programs support the positive values that parents instil in their children.

When children feel safe, their learning increases, and they have more success in the other areas of their lives. According to brain research, when people feel stress or in danger, the brain enters "fight or flight" mode. In this mode the brain reverts to repetitive behaviours and is not capable of higher cognitive functioning like perception, association or analysis. The hormones released into the body suppress memory, and keep the body in an alert and agitated state. These experiences are often the cause of behavioural problems.

The SACSC program promotes problem solving discipline over punishment discipline. The former encourages positive behaviour by helping students learn from their mistakes, and understand why some behaviour is inappropriate. The latter simply punishes disruptive behaviour without teaching students why the behaviour is inappropriate. This problem solving style of discipline expects students to "fix their mistakes and helps students to understand the consequences of their actions and how they affect other people.



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## SACSC Program Area descriptions

### **Supporting a Safe and Caring School**

The objective of this program area is to build a safe and caring school culture. Based on extensive input from school communities and other education stakeholders, SACSC developed “Supporting a Safe and Caring School: Common Attributes,” a document describing the features of a safe and caring school. SACSC worked collaboratively with health and guidance to develop a student survey that will help schools rate their success in each of the attribute areas. SACSC has developed resources in each of its program areas to assist schools in strengthening the attribute areas in which they are weak. There are a number of resources available in this program area.. SACSC reviews research on SACSC topics and condenses the information into quick, easy-to-read booklets. Topics include a series on diversity and another on bullying, as well as individual booklets on the brain and how a child learns, media violence, peer education and mentorship. Staff has presented workshops on these topics and on developing school-wide SACS plans.

### **Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum**

The objective of this program area is to develop safe and caring knowledge, skills and attitudes through study of prescribed curriculum. Resources have been developed to help teachers integrate violence-prevention and character education into all subject areas in the Alberta Program of Studies and Western Canadian Protocol Initiatives from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The elementary resource is titled *Toward a Safe and Caring Curriculum—ATA Resources for Integration: Kindergarten to Grade 6*, and the secondary resource, *Toward a Safe and Caring Secondary Curriculum—Teachers’ Lessons and Strategies*. These resources are recommended and approved by Alberta Learning.

## Fact Sheet

- In 2001, 1.3 million Canadians reported having Aboriginal ancestry, equalling 4.4 per cent of the total population
- From 1901 to 2001 the Aboriginal population multiplied by ten, compared to the total population growth which multiplied by six. The majority of this Aboriginal population growth occurred between 1951 and 2001
- In 2001, the median age for the Aboriginal population was 24., while the median age for the non-Aboriginal population was 37.7
- Children under the age of 14 comprise one third of the Aboriginal population, whereas 19 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population fall into that age group.
- Approximately 50 per cent of Aboriginals live in urban areas.

From: Statistics Canada

2001 Census: Analysis Series

Aboriginal peoples of Canada: a demographic profile.

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/abor/pdf/96F0030XIE2001007.pdf>