

**Speaking Notes for
National Chief Kevin Daniels**

**SUMMIT ON ABORIGINAL EDUCATION
“Strengthening Aboriginal Success”
Moving Toward *Learn Canada 2020***

**Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
February 24, 2009**

Good Afternoon Elders, Chairman McKee, Ministers, Leaders and Participants.

I would like to recognize that we are here today on Treaty Six and Métis traditional territory. I would also like to recognize and introduce Mr. Kim Beaudin, President of the Aboriginal Affairs Coalition of Saskatchewan.

I am pleased to participate in this historic Summit on Aboriginal Education and wish to express my thanks for the opportunity to bring our voice to this table. We want to participate in identifying concrete actions that will strengthen opportunities for Aboriginal students and build the partnerships that will be so important in addressing the needs of this agenda.

This Summit on Aboriginal Education is a positive signal that federal, provincial and territorial governments are prepared to work on improving outcomes in education for our people. We've been down this road before and I hope that we can all communicate the sense of urgency that now surrounds this issue.

Statistics bear out the reality that there is a population explosion among Aboriginal people with a very specific urban focus. This large and growing population of our children and youth means that there is a lot at stake in moving forward on this education agenda. There is no question on the importance of this issue and that a fundamental shift in thinking is required in order to address the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people now live off-reserve.

Our first and central consideration is to have our involvement and participation in education initiatives. We need to have the support of federal and provincial governments, so that CAP can be part of the agenda to address the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal students. This capacity issue lies at the heart of the education policy-making process and needs to be addressed. It is critical that we have long-term and adequate funding.

It is a cold reminder to everyone in this room that Aboriginal students have:

- the highest dropout rates
- the lowest levels of literacy and
- the lowest levels of skills development.

Against this dismal background, we need to take innovative and concrete actions to address the discrimination and disadvantage faced by our students.

Our people have endured many years of discrimination, which has resulted in low levels of education, social marginalization and economic deprivation.

Our great leader Harry Daniels aptly referred to the CAP constituency as "the Forgotten Peoples." There is no defensible reason for continuing to treat off-reserve and Métis peoples in this way. If there is one message that needs to be made today, it's that too many of our people fall between the cracks of the existing educational policies and programs. This was the message Harry delivered 20 years ago, and it remains the case in 2009.

We look forward to reaching agreements on opportunities for moving forward and developing concrete action plans. As we discuss strategies to move forward on eliminating the gap in educational achievement, we must ensure that these efforts are fully inclusive of: all Aboriginal children and youth; urban Aboriginal peoples; Aboriginal women; and Aboriginal people with disabilities.

The needs and concerns of Aboriginal people living off-reserve are more complex than the needs of those on reserve. We are forced to seek solutions in a morass of jurisdictional forces that have resulted in fragmented policies and a patchwork of supports and services. While the problems may seem endless and intractable, we know the concrete actions that are required.

Since 1979, CAP has been calling on federal, provincial and territorial governments to co-operate and support an early childhood education funding strategy. Early childhood development is an essential education program to ensure that all Aboriginal children, regardless of residence, have the very best start in life.

CAP wants to see increased federal funding for Aboriginal Head Start in urban and northern communities, with a sharp focus on those urban areas where there are high numbers of Aboriginal children.

Special attention must be paid to breaking the poverty cycle and social exclusion of our children. Education is a key part of any poverty reduction strategy, yet the existing Kindergarten to 12 system fails to address the needs of our children and youth. Our children are generally less well equipped - socially, emotionally and physically - to undertake school programs. Their disadvantaged position and different day-to-day experiences are not taken into account by school curriculums. It is no wonder that they are unable to benefit fully from the school system.

Post-secondary funding needs to be available for all Aboriginal peoples regardless of their status or place of residence. We want this summit to recognize this as a top priority. All registered Indians who qualify for post-secondary education should have funding made available to them. Currently, Bands are forced to decide between their on and off-reserve Band members or to limit support.

CAP is also calling upon governments to support a national Aboriginal workplace strategy that has an education and skills training plan for Aboriginal people. This strategy needs to include an access and inclusion lens for Aboriginal people with disabilities.

CAP is also looking for increased funding to the AHRDA programs, in order to deal with the expected influx of new clients as a result of the current recession.

Developing a coherent picture of Aboriginal education always entails returning to the ability to read, write and use numerical information. This is crucial to labour market success and many employers have told us about this lack of basic skills.

CAP has always advocated for a holistic approach to address education. We are seeking one that is founded on Aboriginal values and ethics, as well as providing capacity and resources to be engaged. We are looking for a clear sense of direction to develop education systems that are accountable to Aboriginal communities.

I do not pretend that the questions we are dealing with are simple. They are challenging and will demand careful study.

The outcomes from this Summit on Aboriginal Education need to explicitly state that the Aboriginal educational *status quo* is not acceptable and nor is the policy vacuum experienced by off-reserve and Métis peoples.

We look forward to working with federal, provincial and territorial officials to demonstrate that there can be constructive dialogue on Aboriginal education policies and practices. We expect many important and difficult questions to arise in the course of this work, but we remain committed.

We all recognize that the education field is very hard terrain to cover but we are determined to cross it.

Welal'in – Meegwetch – Merci – Thank you –