



Mishishtiani...

When I grow up...



Schooling in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish: A report on community consultations

by Camille Fouillard



March 2013
Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education School Board



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This document reports on the successes and challenges faced by Innu children and the schools of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. It also speaks to the dreams of the Innu for the education and future of their children. The issues are complex and the road is long, but there is a growing interest in education amongst Innu of all ages in both communities. Many people, both within and outside the school, are working hard to help Innu children succeed in school. This report celebrates their commitment and courage. The insights that can be gleaned from the voices in this process will assist educators, decision-makers and the communities to develop school success plans that will help create thriving and viable schools for Natuashish and Sheshatshiu children to grow up to succeed in both the Innu and modern world.

Tshinashkumitin,
Camille Fouillard

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Executive summary

Introduction

After four years in operation the Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education (MT-IE) School Board decided to hold consultations in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. The school board wanted to gather voices about the schools and how everyone could work together to provide the best possible education for Innu children. Focus groups and interviews were held with almost all the staff in both schools and over thirty interviews were conducted in each community with parents, elders, leaders, health workers, school board trustees, youth and Band Council and Innu Nation employees. Participants were of all ages and from different families. People were asked to talk about what they saw as the strengths and challenges of the schools, as well as what changes were needed. Children from grades 4 through high school were asked what they liked, disliked and wished for their schools.

The children are the priority

When asked about the schools' strengths, many adults and school staff in both communities, talked about the students as the schools' greatest asset. They were described as lovable, bright, adaptable, funny, eager to learn, resilient and ingenious. Teachers said students were the best part of their job is the children. Parents spoke with pride about their children doing well in school or graduating. People said students are the communities' hope for the future and the school need to help them realize their dreams.

What the children said

What do the children like about school? In both schools many children said they like gym, sports and art. Some like math, English, music and science classes and others like Innu-aimun, craft classes, hunting and fishing. Some like their teachers and friends. Some don't like school at all while others don't like missing school. In Sheshatshiu the high school students like the block system where they focus on one class for six weeks. For many in both schools, bullying is one thing they don't like. Some don't like swearing, stealing and drugs while others don't like certain classes or detentions. In Natuashish students wish they had more



computers and ipads, while in Sheshatshiu they wish they had a breakfast program. In both communities they want an end to bullying and more after-school activities like sports, drama or a debate club. They also want more school trips, a playground, soccer field and swimming pool. Some want awards or rewards for students doing their best.

Attendance

Many consultation participants said poor attendance is a priority issue. Despite more graduates in both schools this year, too many students don't come to school. These children are the most vulnerable. In Natuashish children seem to drop out after grade 6, while in Sheshatshiu many drop out around grade 9. The reasons for truancy that were discussed include: not understanding English, always failing, bullying, pregnancy, peer pressure, substance abuse, and no support from parents. In Sheshatshiu attendance went down when the breakfast program was dropped, but more high school students are coming with the block system. People said incentives such as school trips to get children to attend are good, but smaller rewards would also work. Other strategies to increase attendance include: extra-curricular activities, tutoring, hosting motivational speakers to talk to students/dropouts, career counseling, and bursaries and scholarships for college or university.



Innu language and culture

For many consultation participants the most important issue was teaching Innu language and culture in school. People said they like existing Innu programming: Innu-aimun classes, visits by elders, the tent classroom, excursions on the land, Innu displays, Innu books and other Innu curriculum. Children need to learn who they are as Innu to build their self-esteem. Many said there is not enough Innu content in the school. Some said it is difficult to have more Innu content when most teachers are non-Innu and young Innu staff may not know enough to teach Innu-aimun and culture. Some people want to see students tested on Innu learnings and marks on the report cards. People shared many ideas for more Innu content in schools: an Innu-aimun immersion program from Kindergarten to grade 3; high school Innu-aimun classes; an Innu curriculum centre; Innu music classes; using existing books, films and websites on Innu culture; changing the school calendar to allow students to be in nutshimit in the spring and fall; makushan and drumming ceremonies in the school; and training both Innu and non-Innu staff on Innu culture and language.

School climate

Consultation participants had many things to say about the school climate, which is about how people get along. People talked about the good relationships in the schools, how teachers love their students, how teachers work as a team, how some teachers and classroom assistants (CAs) work very well together, and how students show respect and help each other. Some teachers and parents sometimes come together to solve problems concerning a child.

Bullying was cited as one of the biggest challenge when it comes to school climate. Bullying was described as: a lack of respect, mocking, threats, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, physical punishment and fighting. People said children are learning bullying from adults and community divisions are brought into the school. Other behaviour problems were discussed, as well as discipline issues, and how it is hard to teach or learn when children are not listening or “out of control”. People talked about the divide between Innu and non-Innu staff and between the staff and the administration. Some people talked about how some staff are under too much stress, how some are suffering from burnout, depression or addictions and how this affects how they do their job.

More and better communication was at the heart of many recommendations people had to make the schools more caring and welcoming. Consistent discipline is needed to deal with bullying and misbehaviour. Good behaviour and good work should be rewarded. Some said more work is needed to heal relationships both within and outside the school. Staff need training in communication and resolving conflict, and the schools need more leadership to promote better teamwork among school staff and with parents and the communities.

Parent and community engagement

Participants said changes to the school will only really happen when parents become more involved. Some parents try to help their children do well in school and elders are speaking out about the importance of education. But people also shared stories about unresolved conflicts that result in children leaving school and losing out. Some people still have problems with the school because of abuse they suffered in the past. Addictions and a lack of education or confidence gets in the way of parents working with the school. People said parents need to go to parent-teacher meetings, visit their children’s classrooms, volunteer in the school, and help with fundraising. The communities need to be more welcoming to teachers and teachers need to try harder to get to know Innu people. The schools need parent-teacher associations, public meetings about the school, and to organize community events like family days, school carnivals and talent shows. The schools should also invite Innu resource people: artists and musicians, health workers to talk about nutrition or healthy sexuality, role models, and leaders to talk about self-government.



Provincial programs and curriculum

Many people talked about Innu children getting a quality education on par with other schools in the province. Teachers talked about their efforts and successes in teaching the curriculum, as well as some of the challenges: how students don't know enough English, the lack of books and other resources, and the lack of assessments especially for children with special needs. There was talk about how students in the two schools have scored low in provincial assessments, but some people said these assessments help raise the standard of education and challenge teachers to improve their teaching. Many people said there needs to be more focus on learning to read and write English.

Governance and administration

A number of people said it was good that the Mamu Tshishkutamashutau School Board was set up. An Innu school board can better understand and respond to the needs of Innu schools. People said the board has done some good work in hiring and keeping good teachers, developing Innu curriculum and reporting back to the communities. People also talked about challenges facing the school board and school administrations. Some people wondered who made decisions related to education. School staff said they need more input in policy, budget, hiring and programming decisions. People in Natuashish talked about the inequalities they saw between the two schools. In Sheshatshiu people said there were too many school closures. Teachers had concerns about not having binding contracts and not being unionized. People in both communities complained about not receiving satisfactory responses to issues they have tried to address with the board.

School staff as well as community participants said there should be clear policies and procedures to guide decision-making. Some said politics need to be kept out of school decisions. Many people talked about the need for more or better communication between all parties: amongst school staff, between staff and students, between staff and parents/guardians, between the school and the school board, and the school board and the community. People had a number of recommendations about staffing: involve experienced educators in hiring; discipline school staff more consistently according to policies and hold them to their code of ethics; conduct regular performance



evaluations of all staff; and provide support to help staff deal with stress and mental health issues. Many people wanted to see orientations and training for non-Innu teachers to learn more about the Innu language and culture. Many also spoke of the need for more certified Innu teachers. The band councils should provide incentives for people to study education and people also wanted to see a teacher-training program offered in the communities with on-the-job-training and apprenticeship training. People talked about the need for extensions in both schools, especially in Natuashish where two classrooms are without windows and a fire hazard.

A vision for our schools

People had many ideas to share about their vision of an Innu school. They described a school where all the children attend regularly and graduate. There are many Innu teachers – trained, passionate and caring Innu teachers – and an Innu principal. The school is safe and welcoming for everyone. Families and elders do everything they can to support the school. Students are learning an Innu curriculum recognized by the province and at the same standard as any other school. They are growing up proud of their Innu identity. Graduates pursue their dreams, go on to college or university, come back to work on self-government and running their own community.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The information from this consultation will be used to develop school success plans for each community. The process of developing the plan can involve administrators, teachers, Innu staff, students as well as elders, parents, leaders and other community members and agencies learning and working together. A community school council could be set up to carry out this task. Through this process parents, elders and leaders can engage, know their input is important, be a part of the decision-making process, and buy into the plan.

A school success plan should address the following priorities:

1. Attendance and retention: a focus on the children, ensuring all children attend school regularly and graduate
2. A positive school climate in which everyone feels safe, valued and welcomed, everyone works together, conflict is resolved, relationships are healed and divisions are bridged
3. Innu culture is recognized as an asset in the school and Innu children are learning concepts and skills required by the province with relevant Innu curriculum
4. Parents/guardians are engaged in the school through outreach and an open door policy. Community resources are used to contribute to the education of Innu children.
5. Committed and caring Innu and non-Innu staff is recruited and provided with the respect, supports, incentives, and training they need to keep coming back
6. All students are able to achieve and succeed, recognizing their individual or special needs and providing holistic support with a particular focus on language development and literacy
7. Post-secondary education is supported including Innu teacher training and capacity needs for self-government.

1.0 Introduction

The Sheshatshiu and Mushuau Innu started going to school in the 1960s. After almost 50 years the two communities were finally able to take control of their schools. The Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education (MT-IE) School Board was set up in 2008 and the Band Councils built beautiful new schools in each communities. The school board is made up of 4 trustees from each community. The trustees are appointed by Chief and Council and one trustee from each community is a Band Councillor. MT-IE now hires all teachers and school staff. It is the voice of the communities and responsible for making sure Sheshatshiu and Natuashish children get a good education.

After four years in operation MT-IE decided to hold community consultations in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. The purpose of the consultations was to gather people's thoughts about school and education, and how everyone – school staff, students, families, leaders and communities could work together to provide the best possible education for Innu children.

The information gathered during the consultations will be used to develop a school success plan for each community to help the schools ensure the children of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish become healthy, well-educated, proud and contributing members of their communities.



2.0 Methodology

The following questions were asked in interviews and focus groups in both communities:

1. What are the good things about the school – its strengths and successes?
2. What are the problems, concerns or challenges facing the school?
3. Is school the same or different for boys and girls?
4. Are children learning what they need to?
5. How can we make our schools more Innu?
6. What can the schools, teachers, children, families, parents, the community do to make the education of our children better?
7. What are the most important issues the school needs to work on?
8. If the school was all the things you wanted it to be, what would it look like?
9. How can we support and help children to attend school and finish high school?
10. Question for elders: What is the history of the school in our community?

Before each interview and focus group, participants were briefed on the purpose of the consultation, why their input was important and how it would be used.

Confidentiality was discussed. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, allowing for new questions to surface. Most interviews and focus groups lasted about an hour, but ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. Some key points of feedback from participants were also discussed through informal discussions with a variety of people within both communities to confirm or verify the information. As well, a brief scan of the literature was done, including books, journal articles as well as websites relating to First Nations education and school success plans.

In classroom workshops the students were asked 3 questions:

1. What do you like about your school?
2. What do you not like about your school?
3. What do you wish for your school?

In Natuashish:

During a two-week visit to Natuashish focus groups and interviews were held with almost all the staff at school. Teachers as well as Innu classroom assistants and support staff participated in focus groups, and interviews were carried out with the principal, the vice-principals, the guidance counselor and one classroom assistant. As well three teachers and one classroom assistant submitted written comments. Workshops were held with students in all classrooms from grades 4 to level 3.

As well 36 interviews were carried out with parents/guardians, school board trustees, leaders, elders, social health workers, Band Council and Innu Nation employees and high school students. This group included 15 males and 22 females; 10 individuals who had worked in the school; 6 graduates and 30 individuals who had not completed high school. Almost all were parents or grandparents with children in school. All age groups were represented, as well as the various clans in community.

held with the principal, the 2 vice-principals and the school director. Written comments were received from one teacher. Workshops were held in all the elementary school classes, as well as in grades 7 and 8. Workshops scheduled with other high school classes were not possible because of school closures.

Thirty-one interviews were conducted in the community with parents/guardians, school board trustees, elders, leaders, social health workers, CYFS employees, band and Innu Nation employees, program directors, and one youth who had dropped out of school. One written response was submitted. Of this group of participants, there were: 12 men and 19 women representing all age groups and family groups; 8 high school graduates; 7 with some college or university education, and 6 who had worked in the school. As well, a 4.5-hours-long radio show elicited 26 calls from 7 men and 19 women. Almost all participants were parents or grandparents with children in school or of school age. Participants were from all age groups and many different families.



Writing the report

The process of compiling this report began by reading and rereading all the notes from interviews, workshops, focus groups, the radio program and written responses. The notes were studied to sort and arrange the information gathered, identify the ideas and recurring themes, and to get an overall sense of the depth, relevance and usefulness of the information. This process of analysis revealed that the feedback from the two communities was very similar therefore the information was combined for the report. The differences between the two schools and communities are identified throughout the text. As well points about which people agreed are noted as well as opposing views. Many quotes from the participants are included to highlight key points. An effort was made to let these direct quotes tell as much of the story as possible.

In Sheshatshiu:

During a two-week visit held in Sheshatshiu, 4 focus groups were held in the school with: elementary school teachers, high school teachers, Innu classroom assistants and hall monitors, and a group of level 2 students. Interviews were

Strengths and limitations of the methodology

A significant number of thoughtful and knowledgeable individuals in both communities were reached through this consultation. The variety and depth of experiences tapped reflect the complexity and challenges facing the two

schools. The level of comfort and trust created in both interviews and focus groups allowed for candidness and the airing of sensitive issues. The information gathered is extensive and rich.

Questions were developed to help participants consider, describe and build on the positive – the strengths, achievements, highlights and resources of the schools and education in both communities. While the very real challenges were discussed, participants were also able to identify strategies and recommendations to overcome these, to build on strengths and to define their hopes and dreams for education into the future.

Qualitative research is such that some of the information gathered is opinion and assumption, and some drawn from memory. This information may therefore be unreliable. While an effort was made to verify information, there may remain feedback in this report that could not be confirmed by cross-checking with multiple sources.

Focus groups with Innu school staff in both communities were brief and the process would have benefited from greater input from this group. Overall this process also

lacked the capacity to capture the nuances of Innu participant feedback that could only be fully expressed in Innu-aimun.

On occasion participants had to be reminded that the consultation was not an evaluation of the schools or staff, and encouraged to speak about concerns and issues rather than the performance of individuals. This report is also meant to be read in this light.

Despite the limitations outlined above, this report provides a wealth of information for anyone interested in the education of Innu children in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. It provides a good foundation for the development of school success plans to address the education needs of all the children in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish, particularly the most vulnerable.





3.0 The results

The information in this report is organized according to priority areas identified through the consultation:

- A focus on the children
- Attendance and retention of students
- Innu-aimun and culture
- The school climate
- Parent and community engagement
- Curriculum and programs
- Governance and administration

The report ends with a vision drawn from the wishes of the children and participant feedback, and a final chapter on recommendations.

3.1 A focus on the children

When asked about the good things or the schools' strengths, adults and school staff in both communities, talked about the students. They said students are the schools' greatest asset and described them as lovable, bright, adaptable, funny, resilient and ingenious. Teachers in particular talked about their love for the children, about the students' eagerness to come to school and their curiosity to learn, especially in the earlier years from kindergarten to grade 6. For many teachers, the students are the best part of their job. Parents spoke with pride about their children doing well in school or graduating. People spoke of the students as the communities' hope for the future. Some people talked about the best students, those who are achieving well and who enjoy being challenged. Some said that rewarding these students, like with the Student of the Year award, was a good thing.

Now it feels like more of a community school, it's more interactive with the kids. There's healthy competition in the school. My son is always coming home saying he's smarter, doing the best, talking about how other kids are behaving, talking with friends about how he's good at math, while others were doing better in other classes.

Parent

The kids are the most important thing to focus on in school, we need to focus on their needs.

Parent

A number of people talked about the role of the school in helping children to dream and the importance of helping them realize their dreams. Children shared some of these dreams, how they want to become: teachers, policemen, leaders, carpenters, tradesmen, architects, artists, nurses, addictions workers and pilots.

Some people talked about the potential and talent of children, even if they are struggling at this time and even if they face many social problems at home and in the community.

These children have so much potential, so much talent that has never had the opportunity to be developed due to the chaos that has always surrounded them, the constant change, the lack of stability at home AND in school (in previous years), imagine what they could do if we as a community gave them everything they need to succeed! What they need most is stability at home, and what they need second most is the same at school.

Teacher



3.2 What the children said

Most students in both Natuashish and Sheshatshiu considered the questions and took the opportunity to share their opinions. While a few had only negative things to say about the school – e.g., that they hated it or found it boring – most identified things they like, dislike or wish for when it comes to their school.

In Natuashish

When students in Natuashish were asked what they like about school, the items listed most often were: gym and playing sports, art and music, as well as core subjects such as math, English and science. Other responses included: Innu class, breakfast, doing crafts, reading, drama, religion, watching movies, learning to cook, homework, and outings. Some of the students' comments had to do with relationships: respecting people, liking their teachers and making friends. Some mentioned spending time in the country, hunting and fishing as well as school trips. A few students said they loved school and learning generally.

When Natuashish students were asked what they did not like about school, their most frequent response was bullying. Related to this students listed a number of other behaviours they did not like: swearing, not listening to or threatening the teacher, not doing work, being disrespectful, smoking, stealing or breaking things. A few said they did not like it when teachers yelled or were mean or boring. Some dislike detentions while others said there is not enough discipline. Some students said they disliked certain subjects: math, science and reading. Some high school students said they did not like getting a lower standard of education. Some students said they did not like to walk home. A few said they did not like to work or they did not like school at all.

When asked what they wished for their school, students in Natuashish generated a long list. Many said they wanted to see an end to bullying. In terms of subject areas, many said they wanted more gym, math, English and science. Wish lists also included a bigger school with a cafeteria/canteen and more equipment, such as computers, ipads and smartboard. Some wanted a playground and swimming pool as well as equipment for the gym, including swings and a trampoline. A games room or arcade featured on a number of lists, as well as Xbox and Play Station games, and wi-fi. Other wishes included: after-school activities and clubs, like track and field, drama, cooking,

and a homework club; more books including Innu books; a strict principal and education; teachers who care; a lunch program; a school bus; hunting and ice fishing outings; skidoos and ATVs; school trips; a counselor for people being bullied; no detentions; more breaks or recess and a shorter day; stop kids from bringing in drugs; movies; art supplies; junk food for snacks; classroom pets; getting paid to go to school; and a school full of students.

I like to do work and doing stuff that is fun. I wish the school has a good learning and doing work and more outings. I hate bullying and teasing and doing bad stuff. Bullies do bad stuff. I like about school is learning and art and language arts and science and spelling. My heart is full of love. Teasing and bullying hurts your feelings or your heart. Love is good manners for your elders, parents, friends, cousins, sister or brother.

Grade 5 student

What I like about school is doing a lot of education: math, geography, language arts, science, social studies. What I don't like about school is bullying, breaking stuff, stealing stuff. I wish school have everything like more macs, more education, more students.

Grade 8

I wish: more art supplies, more computers, more gym supplies, longer breaks, smartboards in each classroom, ATVs and skidoos, after school programs. More trips. I wish the school has more room. I wish it had a second floor.

Grade 9 students



Good things about school are art, gym, respect, making friends, volleyball. Bad things are saying bad words, not doing work, math, teasing, disrespect, bullying. I wish there was no detention, and I wish I had a break for 20 minutes and I go to gym everyday.

Grade 7 students

Sometimes it's like grade one work. When I was in school in Ontario, we were learning things that they were still learning here when I came back in December. This school is very behind. The kids don't listen, disturb the rest of the class. I wish that the school was not so behind, that we learned the same things as other schools. I wish they had better textbooks, more school supplies, pencils, erasers. Not computers because students would go on Facebook and fight over it. The gym should be open every day like a recreation program. If a person wants to be a nurse, have a program where the student can spend time with the nurse on the job. Have a career day.

Level 1 student

I don't see much Innu education. I would like to see more Innu-aimun in the classroom, Innu teachers teaching kids to talk the real Innu. School should take kids hunting and fishing, like the elders did before. Elders would be better teachers.

Level 2 student

In Sheshatshiu

In Sheshatshiu gym, art and math were most frequently mentioned when students were asked what they liked about school. Music, science, computer lab, Innu class, and playing sports or games were also listed by several students. Other subjects noted were: health, social studies and English. High school students said they like the block system. Some students like to journal and read books. A number of students said they like school or learning in general. Some students said they like their friends or their teachers. Some like feeling safe in school, working hard, being nice, getting things right. A few students said they like having a new school and the library. The school bus and snacks were also mentioned.

When Sheshatshiu students were asked what they did not like about school, their most frequent response was bullying. Some students

said they do not like math, art, social studies health, science, gym and music. A few said they do not like to work hard or they do not like school at all. One or two students said they dislike the following: not knowing the Innu culture, not understanding the teacher, no breakfast program, the snacks, ipods not allowed, not enough music, kids smoking cigarettes or weed, students stealing, drug dealers, the early start in the morning, staying after school, swimming, no soccer field, little chairs, homework, and missing school.

When Sheshatshiu students were asked what they wished for their school, the most frequent responses were a breakfast program, a playground or soccer field, and an end to bullying. A number of students also would like a swimming pool, a larger school with a second floor and larger classrooms; more technology such as computers, ipads and ipods; and new desks and chairs. A number of students want more Innu culture. Others want more gym time, music events and talent shows, school teams and sports such as hockey, basketball, track and field, and speedskating; cheerleaders; and afterschool activities or clubs, like a debate team, music club, work-out club, drama club, and a reading and writing club. A few students want more music, math, chemistry and science experiments. Some said there should be student awards, or small rewards for students doing their best. Other wishes include: tutors, better explaining by teachers, drawing competitions, a guitar teacher, an arcade, more free time, being able to choose classes, pencils and erasers, a later start and more breaks, a healthy school, more work,



community support and fundraisers for the school, students getting paid, incentives from parents, teachers talking to parents, more buses and a bully patrol on the bus.

I do like: gym – my favourite free tag, music – my favourite, math – my best, art – my bestest, best teacher, reading with my friends, keeping a puppy and butterflies.

Grade 4 student

I like gym, art, and doing experiments. I don't like our little chairs, math, health and Innu class. I wish we had a playground, more time for gym, more experiments, get to use technology more and have an arcade.

Grade 5 student

I wish the school change because the kids always fighting, calling names and bullying. I wish someone could love me for who I am.

Grade 7 student

I wish someone to actually do something about the bullying instead of just sending the students to the office. We need a club or program to help improve about the bullying.

Grade 8 students

I always have the best attendance. I like to learn, something new everyday. I want an education. I find it too easy. I want to be more challenged.

Level 2 student

I want to learn more about our language and culture, and crafts. I like to learn Innu dancing, teach us how to make canoes, take us camping, snaring rabbits. Take us to the country, make that the reward trip. If the band council could offer that to us, to take classes in the country. We need more Innu-aimun classes, an Innu-eitun course. They could take us

fishing by the mill, have a campfire, we could hear stories. We should have a male crafts person to teach the boys: how to hunt, set things up, how not to get lost, what to do if they have no shelter, how they could make a little shelter, keep you warm.

Level 2 student



I think the school shouldn't change. The school is perfect just the way it is. I wish the school can teach the younger students our Innu ways and the younger students will grow up to be great Aboriginal people and will have a great future.

Grade 4 student



3.3 Attendance and retention



The teachers' biggest challenge is kids not coming. For example, for 3 to 4 years one kid was a regular attendee. He stops attending. The teacher makes contact with the home, the family stops answering the phone. The school liaison goes over to talk to the family. They don't answer the door and tell him to get out of the yard.

Administrator

Poor attendance was seen by many participants as the eventual stepping stone to dropping out of school altogether. Many people spoke with regret about not having completed high school themselves and/or seeing their kids drop out. In Natuashish people talked about how students are dropping out after grade 6. In Sheshatshiu people said students are more likely to drop out in grades 8 or 9.

The strengths and challenges

People talked about how they thought more children are going to school more regularly. A number of participants said the growing number of high school graduates at both schools was also very positive, and they hoped the trend would continue after many years when there were none or very few graduates. Many attributed the increase in attendance to the new and attractive school buildings. In Sheshatshiu some people said all the technology available, including Mac computers, ipads and smartboards, makes the school more attractive to students.

Despite these advances, truancy was identified by many as the most important issue that needs to be addressed. Some people pointed out that children cannot get an education if they do not attend school. Many people talked about how the children who are not in school are those with the greatest needs and falling through the cracks.

The reasons given for the high rate of truancy include:

- students failing or unable to succeed or achieve
- students do not understand enough English
- bullying
- Behaviour issues, suspensions and discipline
- the lack of a breakfast program in Sheshatshiu
- pregnancy
- peer pressure
- lack of support from parents/guardians
- drug and alcohol addictions, or gas sniffing
- low standards
- boredom or students not being challenged enough
- unresolved issues between students, parents/guardians and the school
- children go to treatment and don't come back to school on their return
- falling behind from having missed too much school and/or being in nutshimit
 - the lack of male teachers in elementary
 - no bus or not enough buses
 - bullying on the bus

The challenge is an Innu school doesn't care if the kids don't show up. They don't call the parents, don't want to get involved in someone else's business, don't call to say, "What's happening? Your child's not coming to school." They need to make it their business. I know children who are 10, 14 who haven't gone to school for years. Before they had truancy officers to come to your house and drag us to school.

Parent



It was better when we had the lunch and breakfast program. A lot more kids came to school. People don't have a lot of money to buy groceries. Most kids go to the store at lunch.

Student

Attendance is the biggest issue. We can't get parents to come here. We need the support of parents for us and for the kids. Kids need to get out of bed. Some kids miss because they are babysitting younger brothers and sisters. Kids are being the parents at 12 years old and missing school because of it.

Teachers

More girls like to go to school. Boys don't like it. There are more women teachers than men.

Elder

Kids have to make up their own minds. You can't stop them. The decision is their own.

Parent

I finished grade 10 and then in grade 11 everything was the same. Kids don't feel like they're getting ahead.

Youth

Intelligence-wise, they're fine. The kids will go out to a school elsewhere and they are exemplary, they are succeeding well, but then they come back here and succumb to peer pressure.

Administrator

We have students in junior high. There's not much for them here. At some point in time they fell behind, they've missed key concepts. It becomes cumulative. If you miss certain building blocks, the wall is going to fall. They get frustrated. There is the language barrier.

Teacher

Kids are not being challenged to be more successful, to listen more, to want to do more with their lives.

Parent

There was some discussion about efforts that have been made to increase attendance especially at the high school level. In Sheshatshiu teachers, students and parents talked about how the block system has worked well to keep students in school. With four hours concentrated on one

subject every day, students do not want to miss many days because they quickly fall behind. If they do miss too many days, they can return to school for the next 6-week block. School staff in Sheshatshiu also talked about efforts to equip the school with Apple computers, ipads and smartboards to draw the children into school.

With the block system we're seeing kids getting credits after failing for years because they missed too much school. The instruction is totally different, concentrated. They are expected to be in class everyday and cannot miss more than 5 days during the whole block.

Administrator



My daughter likes the block system, 4 hours a day on one subject. She used to be bombarded by 6 subjects all at the same time. This keeps her in school. If she misses 2 or 3 days, she will fall too far behind, even if she's sick. She likes it better than the old system. She doesn't have to get used to a different teacher all the time, feels comfortable getting to know one teacher.

Parent

Some students said that incentives to promote attendance such as school trips were good, but a number of people complained about school trips because some children who attended regularly were not selected to participate. Some people complained that the same students always get picked for these trips. In Natuashish a number of people, including school staff, parents and students, said organizing a graduation celebration for students who had not completed the required high school credits was a disincentive for these students.

The lack of career planning or resources to help students think about and plan for their future was also identified as a disincentive for children to finish high school. People talked about how the few students who graduate often do not pursue post-secondary education. Some said graduates were unhappy about having to do a transition year to enter university. Some talked about the lack of support to help graduates identify a university or college program. The lack of funding and support services when students move to study in another community were also cited as barriers.

Teachers say these kids have graduated and they're finished high school, but when the kids go for more education, they get their tests back and find out their level of education is only grade 6.

Elder

There's no one to help my daughter, no guidance counselor, to help her find the right college or university. She's on the internet every night trying to figure it out. I'm thinking of other parents who don't have the knowledge, computer skills to help their kids find a college or university. The education director with the Band deals with the funding but doesn't help people explore options. When I was in St. John's in the fall, families were looking for apartments with no support.

Parent

Suggestions and recommendations

People proposed a number of strategies to address poor attendance and the high number of dropouts. A few people said meetings and workshops need to be organized with people from the school and from the community to discuss the issue of truancy. Some recommended holding meetings or conducting a survey to find out what dropouts need to return to school and complete their education.

People discussed what children need to help them attend school every day. They talked about family support and encouragement, and parents making sure their children get sleep and to school in the morning. Some people said children need to achieve and succeed in school to keep them interested.



A highlight for me at school was that I got along really well with my teachers. That's how I learned things. When we had a spelling bee, they asked us all to say those words. Some kids were struggling. I said them all in 10 seconds. Getting it right, being successful, getting moved up a grade was important.

Parent

There are some teenage boys and girls doing well in school. If we could bring them together to talk with those who drop out, let them talk about how to make the school better.

Elder



Other strategies or incentives discussed to help encourage children to attend and stay in school include:

- extra-curricular activities such as sports or drama, music, arts and crafts
- make participation in extra-curricular activities conditional to regular school attendance
- schedule regular activities such as fishing, skating, sliding, hiking, cultural days, and boil-ups to break up the school work.
- a breakfast and lunch program
- a safe and reliable bus service to and from school
- tutoring and classes to help students catch up on content they've missed
- formally recognize education that occurs in nutshimit
- develop strategies with community organizations working with vulnerable children to ensure they go school
- host graduates, role models and motivational speakers to speak to students and dropouts about their successes and achievements
- bring in people from different professions and trades to talk about their studies and work
- field trips, like a trip to Toronto or trips to sports events or the drama festival
- small monthly incentives, like an icard
- a daycare for teen mothers who want to return to school
- ABE classes in the evening
- provide the college or university transition year in the school after level 3
- career counseling and planning, including job shadowing
- self-esteem and confidence-building modules
- bursaries and scholarships for students to pursue education after high school

To help keep kids in school and help them graduate, you make them feel like owners of their school. Give them incentives to return to school: bursaries, scholarships, trips outside. Bring in a Role Model program to keep them motivated to stay in school, not once a year but once a month. Have motivational speakers and offer free food. Put an emphasis on elite sporting activities, send them to high caliber training camps or bring the camps to them.

Parent

Programs need to be made available to young people who are not in school. Look at the people who have completed long walks in nutshimit. These walkers aren't regular school children but they're very good at what they did on the land and they were successful.

Classroom Assistant



The community needs a youth centre where they can come and stay. The centre needs to be run as an all-day school with counselors and people they know and trust. They need to be constantly busy; it's when they're bored that they get into trouble. Hire certified teachers to run it and continue the learning. Teach the kids how to cook, clean, how to entertain themselves without turning to gas, make documentaries, films. There is a filmmaker in the community, why not utilize her talents? There are talented people here who have much to share with the youth. They need an opportunity to do so that is organized and supported.

Teacher

3.4 Innu-aimun and culture



The strengths

Many people talked about the importance of teaching Innu language, culture, traditions, history and crafts in school. For many participants in both communities this was the most important issue. When asked about the good things or strengths of the schools, many pointed out existing Innu programming, including:

- Innu-aimun language classes from K to 9
- visits by elders to share stories, legends, history, geography
- Innu curriculum development: the dictionary and books
- Innu content or modules in provincial curriculum
- Displays around the school including Innu art, crafts, photographs and artifacts
- The tent classroom where elders share stories and teaching Innu cooking and other traditional skills
- Excursions on the land
- Opportunities for students to participate in walks like the Natuashish Walkers or those led by Elizabeth Penashue or Michel Andrew
- an Innu classroom for teaching Innu language
- craft classes
- efforts to integrate Innu culture into the curriculum, for example in social studies or science

Older kids especially in school like it when I talk about the Innu legends. They want to know more. It helps them a lot to hear the old stories. The kids want to know more. It makes them feel better about themselves, about being Innu. The kids love the movies of Innu legends.

Elder

People talked about how Innu content in the school was important to help children have a strong sense of identity – to know who they are and help build their self-esteem. Some said Innu content was especially important for children who were not learning the language or culture at home. Parents/guardians as well as teachers talked about how it is important for non-Innu teachers to see the children and learn about the Innu culture in nutshimit (the country).

My girl went on Elizabeth Penashue's walk and I saw how happy she was in her pictures. It motivated her a lot to walk that far, to get involved in her culture. It opened her eyes, made her feel proud of who she is as an Innu. It was a confidence builder.

Parent

People here are still connected to the land. It is important for us to see kids who are having difficulties, behaviour problems, a lack of accomplishment, trying to cope, to see them on the land entirely different with a sense of their own worth, able to succeed at things.

Teacher

The challenges

Most people expressed concerns regarding the loss of Innu language and culture in both communities and the lack of Innu-aimun and Innu cultural content in the school. People talked about how recent assessments in both schools are showing that the language is in trouble. There were various opinions about the role of the school in teaching culture. Some people, especially in Sheshatshiu, said that the school might be the only place that some Innu children learn Innu-aimun or about the culture. Other people argued that Innu culture and language needs to happen at home. Some said a lot of it can only be taught on the land. Both Innu and non-Innu talked about the challenges of teaching Innu language and culture when most teachers are non-Innu. Some had concerns that non-Innu teachers arrive with little or no understanding about the school or community they will serve. There was discussion about how universities do not prepare teachers to teach in First Nations' schools. As well some people had concerns about



whether young Innu staff are knowledgeable enough to teach Innu-aimun and culture.

It's not the school's job to teach Innu-aimun. Language starts long before kids start school.

Parent

Now young people learn a lot of English and they don't know a lot of Innu words. They use a lot of English words when they speak Innu, instead of using the Innu words. Innu teachers don't teach enough Innu. When I was a teacher aide, I taught a lot of Innu writing. I never see any Innu writing from my grandchildren, only English. My grandchild can't read Innu.

Elder

The most important is that kids learn about the Innu way of life in the past. The reason the community took over the school, we thought we would teach kids more Innu. It's good to teach the white way, but there is not enough Innu being taught. It's very important that the language not be lost.

Elder

The youth are losing their identity as Innu persons. They feel shame that they are Innu. That shame has been there for a long time. You see kids dyeing their hair, looking different from the others, they don't want to look Innu. The kids need help to be made proud of who they are and where they come from.

Leader

Community participants and school staff, both Innu and non-Innu, said there was not enough Innu-aimun instruction. School staff said it was often less than the 3 scheduled classes per 14-day cycle because of school closures or absent teachers. A number of people also bemoaned the lack of Innu language classes in the high school. Parents/guardians and students were concerned about the standard of Innu-aimun instruction. Many people in both communities said that the crafts teachers were showing students women's crafts and instruction in men's crafts was not being offered. A few parents in Natuashish complained that their children were learning Sheshatshiu Innu-aimun in school. Some parents said they would be more likely to send their children to school if there was more Innu curriculum.

Innu courses need credits. Grade 12 students don't know the names of months in Innu-aimun.

Parent

There is a lack of Mushuau Innu materials. We need better pronunciation. The younger ones speak better than the older ones. Are the kids losing their language as they go through school? In Kawawa, they hired 5 people just to teach language, reading and writing.

Leader

Suggestions and Recommendations

There were many opinions about how to increase or improve Innu language and culture programming in the schools. Opinions varied about how much time should be spent on learning Innu-aimun and culture. Some parents wanted the school to focus on Innu instruction, especially in the younger grades, while others thought it was more important for the children to learn English and the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum to be able to function in the modern world. Still others said they wanted to see a balance of the two and their children learning the best of both worlds.

Our children need to be learning from Innu books, graduating for being Innu.

Parent

I want my sons hunting and I want them to finish school.

Parent



If we concentrate on Innu-aimun we won't get anywhere. Programs are in English. You can't learn to be a pilot in Innu-aimun. You need English, math, science to go on with your education.

Trustee

People shared a variety of ideas for programs and activities for teaching culture and language in the school. Some people said that Innu instruction should be held to the same standard as any other curriculum. They wanted to see tests and a mark on the report card. Other suggestions included:

- an Innu-aimun immersion program from kindergarten to grade 3
- Innu-aimun literacy classes in the high school
- a high school history book about the Innu and other First Nations
- teach traditional Innu games with bones, boughs and strings.
- Innu music classes on traditional and contemporary Innu music
- post a map of the Innu traditional territory and use the Innu place names website as a teaching tool
- show films about the Innu and Christine Poker's films about Innu legends
- make better use of available resources
- hold makushan and drumming ceremonies in the school
- students' cultural projects such as recording or filming elders
- include books by Innu authors in the curriculum, like Nympha Byrne, Alex Andrew and George Gregoire as well as authors from Quebec, and non-Innu writers like anthropologists
- provide evening classes in Innu-aimun for adults

There are different ways to bring culture into the classroom. Like they could bring in a drummer, make a lesson plan about how to play an Innu drum, how the Innu drumming is not like in other cultures where kids are playing the drum. In our culture you have to dream about playing the drum before you can do it.

Leader

In Natuashish there should be only Innu taught in the primary grade with Innu people teaching those grades. We could have an older person teach Innu because younger people don't know the language so well. We could have younger Innu working with an elder to do the teaching. If this happens, the school would be quieter. If they had an elder, kids are really into legends. It's really good to have an elder in the classroom telling legends. Also a lot of spirituality could be taught, like respect and sharing. The children need to learn these things at a young age.

Elder

There needs to be a proper Innu history course, the epic story of how the Innu lived on this vast territory and how they all knew each other through generations, they knew people from generations back. They need to understand their genealogy, the family stories. They should know their history from deglaciation onward. Kids' hearts could be so big, pumping with pride to know their own history.

Parent

School staff as well as community participants said the school should find ways to integrate the Innu approach of learning through observation and experience in its curriculum and programming. People had a number of suggestions about curriculum development to support more Innu content in the school. Specific suggestions included:

- create a curriculum centre with full-time staff, including an educator and Innu
- research Innu curriculum developed in other Innu communities
- develop a high school credit course about governance, traditional government structures, justice, history, traditional knowledge, geography, medicines, and Innu spirituality
- develop a resource that would help teachers integrate Innu cultural content in all the classes: science, math, social studies, health, music, etc.

In our education system children are constantly measured and judged. This goes against the Innu way of learning, which is participatory, non-structured, incremental, more holistic.



Elders and adults do things, kids watch, become more familiar with the concept over time, mimic the activity and put the pieces together. Like teaching woodworking: with some kids you just show them once or they watch their friends, they step up to the band saw like they've practiced. It's like this for drawing, painting, dancing. They learn communally, it's a shared knowledge. How do you fit this in a Western education system? Who says learning has to take place within 4 walls? Why not spend days in a tent? Eat, prepare food, tell stories, history, heritage, hunting, ecology?

Teacher

A number of people wanted to see the school provide more opportunities for children to learn about their culture on the land. People suggested the school could do this by working with people in the community who organize the outpost program as well as healing programs and youth programs. Some people said this kind of programming would help bridge the divide between the school and the community. Community participants from both communities as well as some school staff said the schools should change the school calendar to support families spending time in nutshimit in the spring and fall.

They need to change the calendar. Adaptations to the school calendar have been made in other northern communities. School should close down in October when many more people could be out in the country, or April. Shut the school those months. INAC says you have to have 183 days in school but they could change the months around. You'd have to recruit staff who were willing to follow this calendar. The Band Council and Innu Nation also have to get in this rhythm.

Parent

Some people had recommendations to improve cultural programming that had to do with staffing and building capacity. These included:

- train and involve more Innu in producing curriculum, including Innu artists
- hire an elder on staff full-time, or elders part-time, to teach culture
- hire a male crafts instructor to teach how to make snow shoes, toboggans and canoes
- ensure Innu staff in Natuashish can teach the Mushuau dialect
- train Innu teachers
- involve elders to help with teacher training for language instruction
- have non-Innu teachers study Innu-aimun and culture and spend time on the land
- provide professional development on Innu culture and language for non-Innu staff
- provide a nutshimit orientation for non-Innu teachers at the beginning of the year



We can bring kids on the road, teach them how to pick berries, snare rabbits, hunt porcupine, show them a robin's nest, show them what kind of berries we eat, what the name is. Teachers learn too, the names of the medicines. Some kids have never seen those things. Bring the kids for 1 or 2 weeks, show them what kinds of trees you use to make snowshoes, toboggans, making canoes, all kinds of different trees. Even the animals hunted for fur: beavers, mink, muskrat, squirrel, weasel, foxes, lynx, wolf, kuekuatsheu. We have to bring this school to nutshimit.

Elder

3.5 School climate

People shared many opinions in both communities about the strengths and challenges related to school climate. The school climate impacts both teaching and learning, and is about how people get along. A good school climate exists when students, staff, parents and grandparents feel safe, supported, valued, connected and accepted on a social, emotional, intellectual and physical level. Although many if not most people expressed concerns regarding school climate, many also identified strengths to build on in creating safer and more caring schools.

students and between students and staff; teamwork; trust and respect; staff morale; classroom management; parent support; and improvements in student behaviour and achievement.

The strengths of the school are the kids are eager to go to school; they like it. There's a lot of interacting between teachers and kids, a good relationship. Some teachers are really good; those who really want to be here. There are CAs who want to work in the school; that's good.

Leader

Another good thing is the kids are good at sharing their knowledge, helping each other. If one of them, for example, gets a math concept, the students who gets it will share it with others.

Administrator

Sometimes when the CA is not in the room, a teacher comes to me to talk to kids when they don't listen and I help them out. People know I'm good with the kids. Parents come and tell me kids are always talking about me. The kids come into the classroom and give me hugs.

Classroom Assistant

My son was bullying some other boys. First he was bullied. I told him to stand up for himself and then he got too tough. I went to talk to the other parent. This other person is crying a lot. I said we have to learn a way to help our kids. We talk about how we both love our sons. Things work out when we talk. We cry and we hug each other.

Parent

A number of people – including teachers, administrators and parents – said they thought the school was a safe place for children, especially for some of the more vulnerable children with problems at home. Parents spoke about how their children love their teachers and classroom assistants (CAs). Administrators, trustees, parents and students praised good teachers for being caring, committed, inspiring, enthusiastic, patient, passionate, and having high expectations of students. Participants from both schools and communities also had praise for Innu staff: for caring and loving the children, for taking responsibility and leadership in the school, for initiating activities like graduation events, and for sharing their knowledge of the



The strengths

Several days were spent in both schools while conducting the consultation. During this time, many positive and supportive interactions were witnessed between students, between staff and students, and amongst staff. Students were respectful and most of them seemed engaged. The few behaviour problems that were observed were minor. Except for a few exceptions, both staff and students in both communities were helpful and open to participating and providing feedback in the consultation. This contrasts with previous experiences in the schools.

When asked about the schools' strengths, many people had comments relating to the school climate. They talked about what makes the school a place that students and staff want to be. They talked about interactions between



Innu language and culture. Teachers and parents in both communities had positive things to say about some administrators, including being caring, fair, reliable, responsive, consistent, tough, no nonsense, involved with students and staff, listens to feedback, ensures order and structure, and has a sense of humour.

School is a haven for a lot of kids and the teachers need to create this haven.

Parent

Teachers are fun, funny, nice. The best teachers: they push us more, teach us the same as they would in any other school. They don't think that we can't do it. There should be thanks to the good teachers.

Student

I am very grateful that non-Innu come here to help us, I like too that they have the courage. There are some very good teachers and CAs who want to help the kids 100 percent, both Innu and non-Innu.

Trustee

Teachers and CAs talked about how they love the children and how the children are what keep them coming back year after year. Some people talked about how children know and trust teachers, especially returning teachers. In Natuashish some school staff talked about how a caring school climate is necessary for teaching academics.

The Director is very focused on how teachers are working with the kids, the relationships. Are kids happy and safe? She's not asking for lesson plans... I don't care about FASD, ADHD. We have an FASD child who's learning exponentially because teachers really care about him. Most successful teachers are ones who care. They can be strict and structured and still have a lot of fun. Kids bring a lot of issues from home, Teachers need to take care of them, not be focused on the board. Kids shut down if you don't pay attention.

Administrator

I love that I get to work with students when they are at their best, which is in small groups of no more than 4 at a time. I love that they are excited to come with me. I love it when they put their little hands in mine and know that they trust me to take care of them. I am proud to be their teacher. I love seeing them improve, hearing their funny little stories, sharing a laugh or a song (they love music! so do I).

Teacher

The level of openness and candidness demonstrated during staff focus groups in both schools speaks to the level of trust and mutually supportive relationships amongst many staff. This was confirmed by non-Innu teachers in both schools who talked about how they work well as a team, how they support each other a lot, and how teacher morale amongst themselves is high. Administrators in both schools also spoke about their staff working as a team. As well some teachers and CAs in both schools commented on how they work well together, how they need and complement each other in the classroom. In Sheshatshiu high school teachers spoke of how they are successfully team teaching.

I've been working in the school for a few years and I love working with children. The teacher I'm working with is doing a good job. I've seen and worked with different teachers who learned the language and our culture and I enjoy working with the other Innu staff and sharing my experiences with new ones who come in. That is teamwork and what it's supposed to be about.

Classroom Assistant

When I was working there the teacher was really good with the kids. We were learning to play SUDUKOs, like a race to see who finished first. The winner would get a treat. We played hangman. The kids were really into it. I was amazed how much the students like that. A good teacher is enthusiastic. Me and that teacher worked as a team.

Classroom Assistant



We combined the grade 9s. Now we're team teaching. If three kids are struggling, a teacher can take them out and focus on their needs. Every class is multi-grade class and has special education kids, and kids with reading level from K to 9. Every grade needs team teaching.

Teacher

A number of people, including school staff and parents, talked about how improvements in student behaviour also contribute to a more positive school climate.

Students are less disruptive. There's little or no abuse or hostility towards teachers. In the fall students will rock houses to initiate the teachers. It's not as bad now. There is less vandalism and graffiti. This reflects a greater respect for the school.

Administrator

The challenges

When asked about challenges facing the schools, most people had concerns about the school climate. The issues most frequently mentioned were: bullying and fighting; student behaviour and discipline; a lack of communication; unresolved conflict; morale and a lack of teamwork.

Bullying, misbehaving and discipline

Many people said bullying was the most important challenge facing the school. It was identified by many children as something they did not like about the school,

and it was also cited as one of the main reasons for students leaving school. A number of parents talked about keeping their children home from school because of bullying. People described bullying as: a lack of respect, teasing and mocking, angry shouting, threats, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, kicking and punching, physical punishment and fighting. In Sheshatshiu many people talked about bullying in the school bus. School staff, parents and elders shared concerns or stories about bullying behaviours, not only amongst children, but also between students and teachers and between teachers and CAs, teachers and administrators, and school staff and parents.

Students, when they behave really badly, like when one of them put a knife to a teacher's throat. It was meant to be a joke, but nothing was done about it.

Student

The other students are doing better. I feel ashamed and I don't like it. I need to learn what I don't know and ask the teacher to help me. Most other students disrespect me. Students been swearing and the teachers don't always believe when students are confronted. Students always been the target to be embarrassed by other students. Students say the other student did something wrong and it's not true and embarrass them. The reason I quit school, I been bullied and laugh at. Every student is affected by the violence in school.

Youth

There's a lot of dramas going on at school with the arguing and fighting. Students bully teachers and it's not right. Teachers are here to teach us and to learn new things everyday.

Youth

Many people expressed concerns about behaviour problems other than bullying and fighting. These behaviours include: swearing, not listening to the teacher, refusing to do work, roaming hallways, stealing, lying, playing on ipods or Facebook, smoking, and doing drugs. Students, parents and school staff in both communities talked about how it is difficult to teach or learn in a classroom where children are misbehaving. High school students also identified unruly behaviour as one of the reasons they did not attend school regularly. Some people talked about how children are misbehaving because they do not understand or cannot follow what is being taught. Some said children were misbehaving because they were falling behind or unable to succeed in their school work.



Young children and some of the youth, they think they are the boss, that they can do whatever they want, go out for a smoke, lie down on the floor in the hallway. Teachers are afraid of the kids and parents. The kids make up stories, even small children. I don't know what would be best to deal with these problems.

Elder

Some students are high on drugs. When I was walking in the hallway, an Innu teacher asked them what they were doing. They said they were high. I could see that they were.

Health worker

My son asked to be moved to another class. There was too much misbehaving in his class, kids walking in and out, uncontrollable. He couldn't learn anything. This behavior was affecting the whole class.

Parent

School staff and community participants talked about how behaviour issues, including bullying, stem from the community and the children's homes. Some said bullying in school is a reflection of community divisions and children are learning to bully from adults. Some people talked about how conflicts in the school are often experienced along family and political lines. People also talked about broken homes and the lack of parenting. People said the result is that some children don't listen or are "out of control."

The school sees bullies as the bad child, but need to look beyond it. Children are bad for a reason. Monkey see, monkey do. Kids do what they see adults do. Parents keep kids home because kids are bullied, but they grow up and become bullies.

Health worker

The parents don't get along. Kids are doing the same thing in school. Parents are fighting and kids are fighting. Parents have a big influence on the kids.

Student

This is not a school problem, it's the community. Problems are coming from the home. If I can't help myself, if I'm doing drugs, alcohol, beating up my wife, I can't lead the community. As head of the family, parents need to lead by example. Parents need to look at themselves, learn from their experiences, from their life.

Leader



There continues to be an issue with behaviour. It's not as bad as it was but there's still a long ways to go before we see more permanent improvement. This is largely related to problems at home. Kids come to school tired, sometimes angry, sometimes sad, don't feel safe enough to talk about it so they act out. Many also have learning disabilities that are undiagnosed, which is another weakness. Many don't attend regularly.

Teacher

A lack of discipline or consistent discipline was identified as a major challenge for both schools. Some teachers in Natuashish said the environment was "too easygoing." A lack of clear discipline protocol was discussed as well as a lack of protocol to deal with various types of incidents. Some administrators and teachers talked about challenges in following protocol. A number of parents said they were not aware of school protocol, particularly around discipline.

There's not enough detention or discipline. We're just yelled at or sent home. Teachers don't want to do detention. And too many detentions make kids not want to come to school.

Student

We file 10-12 incident reports every day. Teachers form their own guidelines of what they will deal with themselves, when they will fill out a report. If we documented every incident, it's all we would do. We need to do a triage, assessing levels of severity. What might get you expelled at another school is different from here. Our tolerance has to be greater.

Teacher



The biggest problems are the kids picking on each other, parents come in angry. They don't know how to talk to the teacher about it, or to the kids. Let's say if I came along, I'm mad that my kids gets picked on, another person comes along, I have no right to get involved. It should be about the parent, the teacher and the kid, between them.

Student

Unresolved conflict

School staff, parents and students shared stories of failed attempts at addressing issues at school. Communication broke down and conflicts were never resolved. A number of parents/guardians expressed anger and frustration about what they saw as the school's failure to resolve the situation at various levels: with the teacher, the administration and the school board.

Some parents and students/youth expressed concerns about some of the disciplinary measures being used in the school. Some people said there were not enough suspensions while others said too many children were dropping out after being suspended. There was discussion about how repeatedly sending children to the office or suspending them did not help to change behaviours. A number of people said that the children who were being suspended were the most vulnerable children – the most likely to fall through the cracks. Some people shared stories of physical punishment.

Kids know when they are not treated right, pushed around, made to stand in a corner, suspended, given a paper.

Parent

Some people discussed how the relationship between the school and parents/guardians in dealing with behavior issues affects the school climate. Some people said differing discipline practices or a lack of discipline at home clashed with the schools' attempts to discipline children and work with parents. Parents and elders said parents no longer know how to discipline since physical punishment is no longer condoned. People talked about how school staff would not discipline children because they were afraid of the parents, while others said some parents were scared to stand up for themselves and their children.

When I get an incident paper about my son, I said why didn't you talk to me after school? Talk to me, let's work as a team for the good of the child. I was working on changing his behaviour too.

Parent

Community members, school staff and students talked about how people don't know how to talk to each other when there is conflict, how longstanding divisions interfere with some people's ability to talk to each other, and how situations get blown up because personal issues take over. Conversations turn into what people called the "blame game," deflecting attention from the child and solving the problem. Communication breaks down before the parties are able to get the full story. Some expressed concerns about conflicts being aired in public through gossip, Facebook and the community radio. Parents, teachers and administrators also talked about how political interference from leaders and trustees undermine policies and decisions of school administrators or the school board, and do not help to resolve problems.

Staff morale

Innu and non-Innu staff in both communities expressed concerns regarding staff morale. While teamwork amongst staff was identified as a strength in both communities, a number of staff said this was not the case across the board. Some people spoke about the cultural divide between the non-Innu and Innu staff. Some said the divide existed between administration and the rest of the staff. People in both schools spoke of tensions between administrators. Some teachers and CAs spoke of difficulties in working together. Fighting amongst Innu staff in Natuashish was identified as an issue by school staff as well as community members. School staff in both communities talked about the lack of communication or relationship with the school board staff and trustees. Some spoke of the lack of overall leadership in facilitating more communication, teamwork and cooperation amongst staff.

Sometimes teachers and CAs don't talk much or communicate at all. The first teacher I worked with didn't communicate and that didn't work out well.

Classroom Assistant

When I worked there, I saw too many problems between the Innu staff, CAs gossiping, fighting amongst each other, family issues, too much politics whenever there is an election. They bring gossip in the school. I saw a lot of conflict between non-Innu teachers and Innu CAs. No teamwork.

Parent

I feel we don't communicate here. We used to sit and talk with people. We'd talk about every issue. We'd have workshops on what we need to know. We'd do activities together.

Innu staff

This is not an equal playing field. Most people working in this school keep their mouths shut, their heads down, or they lose their job.

School staff

Staff in both schools spoke of the lack of staff meetings or opportunities to share and debrief. They spoke of meetings being rushed, of not feeling heard, of not being able to address serious issues, such as student assaults or a suicide attempt. Some teachers said they felt put down or condescended at meetings. Teachers in both communities complained about being told they are “replaceable”. They talked about the lack of feedback and recognition for their hard work. They said they did not feel appreciated by the administration, the school board or the community. Teachers shared stories of situations in which they felt treated unfairly and had no recourse because they are not unionized. There was talk about teachers being disciplined or fired when they raised issues about the school.

When I hear teacher bashing, it makes me not want to be here. We get little or no appreciation from our bosses... Teachers never meet with the board, the trustees. There's little communication going on, zero communication between us and the administration and the school board... During staff meetings, we're not allowed to speak. We know the administration is facing many challenges but we're always walking on eggshells. We should be a team. Teachers are the ones who are keeping this school going.

Teachers

Teacher retention here is really good. Kids show us nothing but love. We're here because we love the youngsters. We would NEVER leave because of the kids. Poor school morale is what will make us leave... The administration doesn't have our back... I was so excited my first year here, but slowly life has been sucked out of us. We're told at staff meetings that we're replaceable... If you want to make changes here you lose your job.

Teachers

In both communities people expressed concerns about the mental health of school staff. Administrators, teachers, parents, trustees and students all worried about the stress levels of school staff. Some people expressed concerns about staff struggling with depression, burn-out or addiction problems. This results in staff missing too many days of work. Teachers talked about how they have to do more than just teach and feel unequipped to deal with the problems students bring into the classroom. Some teachers said they were experiencing “post traumatic stress syndrome” or “compassion fatigue.” Some people talked about the lack of resources and support to help school staff work with troubled children and to stay healthy in order to do their job.

We have limited resources and we need to balance the child's need with the teacher's sanity and safety. Are decisions being made always correct? Everyone is working hard, doing their best. There's a lot of mutual support, a good team, but everyone is burning out.

Administrator





Bullying, misbehaviour and discipline

People had a number of suggestions about how to address issues of bullying, misbehaviour and discipline. School staff and community members said the schools needed to work with the community to develop strategies to address bullying and related issues. Some said clear discipline/incident protocol should be developed with all parties involved and all parties including students, school staff and the community needs to be aware of the protocol. Parents said children need to be educated about bullying and the school should provide an ongoing anti-bullying program for all classes. Parents said they should be contacted as soon as an issue arises before it develops into a crisis. The need for bus monitors was mentioned in Sheshatshiu.

Some staff need healing. The staff need to be energetic, playful, they need to love kids, be positive thinkers, active, enjoying the kids. Some of the staff need treatment so they don't bring their problems to school.

Administrator

They should focus on teachers, try to make them calm so they don't get stressed out. That way they can do a better job.

Student

Grade 4 students are sniffing gas. There was a suicide attempt in school, but we were told to keep it hush hush. We are professionals, but we're expected to be mom and dad and counselor. We are educators.

Teacher

Recommendations to improve school climate

Many consultation participants recognized the importance of creating a positive, safe and welcoming school climate for students, staff and community members. They had a number of suggestions about how to improve the school climate, including suggestions about how to address behaviour and discipline issues, how to improve relationships both within and outside the school, and how to improve teamwork and staff morale. At the heart of all these suggestions was the need for better communication. A number of people said their needs to be more recognition and celebration of the positive things already going on in the school. Students, staff and parents need to be celebrated for their contributions.

Innu Education should have a public meeting about bullying, listen to concerned parents, who need to have input into their policies. If the school calls me to say my daughter has been suspended, we need to work together to develop policies that will work.

Parent

I wish someone to actually do something about the bullying instead of just sending the students to the office. We need a club or program to help improve about the bullying.

Grade 8 students

There were differing opinions regarding how to work with troubled or misbehaving children and create a classroom environment that supports teaching and learning. Some educators talked about the need to deal with each situation individually according to the child's needs and how the situation of each child had to be considered over policies and procedures. One suggestion was to dedicate a classroom for children experiencing these difficulties.

Every child, every situation is different. The child may have been up all night. Parents are hungover when you call the next day. You need to be consistently concerned, loving, open and non-judgemental. There needs to be flexibility in policies and procedures.

Administrator

Love, support, firmness and repetition is what the kids need.

Administrator



People had different suggestions about how to promote good behaviour or how children should be disciplined. Some people said behaviours needed to be modeled, for example, adults listening and being respectful in all their interactions. Some people suggested a positive approach to discipline: using incentives to inspire and reinforce good behaviour. Some people thought discipline should involve consequences or the removal of privileges. Some people thought the traditional punitive approach was the most effective. Parents and elders suggested classes in religion or spirituality could help students learn more respect for each other and the adults in their lives.

They should have some kind of firmness. The teachers should be strong in their teaching. They are too soft. They can't discipline the kids now. Discipline to me is to let kids know what the boundaries are, kids need to understand how far they can go.

Elder

Parents have to discipline their kids more. Kids should get grounded. My father says I can just go to school, or not. Parents should take things away from their kids to discipline them. Teachers should be talking to the parents more. A lot of kids would be disciplined if the teachers called their parents.

Student

They should be teaching religion. Kids need spirituality, some kind of support to help them feel better about things. If there's no church, where do they learn these things? They need to believe in good and bad, need to learn right from wrong. Elders like religion.

Parent

Communication

Recommendations by consultation participants about how to improve communication, resolve conflicts and promote better teamwork include: regular staff meetings and assemblies, more present and responsive leadership, training or professional development in communication skills, and following protocol or providing training in mediation and conflict resolution

The teachers and Innu CAs should have more skills and learn how to prevent the blaming and gossiping. There needs to be more teamwork and communication between the teachers and CAs. They need to interact more with all the students and with the parents.

Innu staff

A number of other recommendations related to improving the school climate have to do with greater parent and community engagement and are listed in the following section.



3.6 Parent and community engagement



Parents talked about encouraging and supporting their children to go to school. People talked about events that draw the community in the school, such as the Christmas concert and graduation ceremonies. In Sheshatshiu people talked about how more parents are attending parent-teacher meetings. Teachers talked about how incentives (the chance to win an ipad) help to bring in more parents for parent-teacher meetings. Although school board AGMs (Annual General Meetings) do not draw a crowd, trustees and parents who attend AGMs said the meetings were a good forum to discuss issues.

We do see way more parents here now than we did 4 years ago. A lot of parents really want to know what their kids are learning and that they are up to standard.

Teacher

The strengths

Many people talked about the importance of the school and community working together to make sure the children get the education they need. Overall there was agreement that there is not much community involvement in either schools, but participants from both schools and communities did share stories about the connections that are happening and identified these as a strength. Some people also said the situation was improving, particularly since Mamu Tshishkutamashutau was set up. The relationship between school staff and parents/guardians was cited as especially important and sometimes teachers, CAs and parents do manage to work together to help resolve issues with a child. A number of people talked about how changes to the school will really happen when parents become more involved. There was talk about how more people are seeing the value of education in both communities and how elders are speaking to the importance of the children getting an education. People talked about how the new buildings have contributed to this growing respect for education.

I really want my kids to finish school, to do something with themselves, to get a job.

Parent

The relationships I was able to develop with my students, and some of their parents, are what keep me coming back.

Teacher

School staff attending community meetings such as inter-agency meetings was cited as a good thing. In Sheshatshiu there was discussion about how parents who are sending their children to school outside the community are thinking of returning to the Sheshatshiu Innu school. These are parents who value education and get involved with the school.

Teachers and community members in Natuashish talked about how some of the best connections between the school and the community happen when people are together on the land. Teachers talked about how they get to bond with Innu when they are in their own environment. Community members talked about how they appreciated seeing non-Innu teachers show an interest in hunting and the land.

When something happens in my classroom, the parents come in and I talk to them. I call them. Sometimes the kids get mad. One child in my class gets very hyper, angry, kicking me, crying. It was good that the parent came in. The parent said if the kid was kicking me again, she would take him home and talk to him. It never happened again.

Classroom Assistant



The principal used to teach kids how to trap rabbits and the kids gave the rabbits to elders. I went in the winter out in the country. I saw a lot of kids on the ice. I went in the tent and saw lots of teachers. They take the kids to the country and they were happy. I saw teachers interacting the kids and it was really good. Kids were teaching the teachers.

Parent

Going on the land for teachers opens their eyes to who the students really are.

Administrator

The challenges

The lack of community and parent involvement in the school was cited as a major issue in both communities. People described this as a lack of connection, cooperation or communication. As discussed in the section on school climate, there is a lack of cooperation between school staff and parents/guardians in addressing issues with children. School staff, parents/guardians and students shared stories about confrontations spiraling into conflicts that remain unresolved. These conflicts impact attendance and were cited as one of the reasons children drop out of school. A number of people talked about how the pervasive fighting and divisions in the communities impact relationships with the school. Some people talked about the climate of negativity in the communities, how people do not support each other and put each other down.

Whenever students are fighting at school, the teacher call the parents right away to talk about their children and it happen many times that the parent told a teacher to send their kids home right away. They don't deal with the issues or concerns. They just get mad so easily and then they don't let their kids go to school for weeks. The parents never ask for assignment or homework to help their children when they're not in school.

Classroom Assistant

Kids do something wrong and parents say just kick them out. Why don't parents try to work with the school. Parents need to try harder to work with the school and the school needs to work with parents, more than just send home a report card.

Parent

Many people in both communities talked about the legacy of substandard education and abuse that occurred in the two schools in the past. Adults and elders shared stories of

verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Both school staff and community members talked about how this legacy continues to create a divide between the school and the community. For some the anger and hurt caused by this abuse continues to fester and colour their view of the school, affecting their ability to work or get involved with the school. Some parents and grandparents talked about their struggle to trust that the school is now a safe place for children.

When I was a student, I was abused. I could understand if parents get angry today if the teacher talk to them in a certain way. They have to talk to me, because of my past.

Parent

It's tough when parents have had such traumatic experiences. There is so much pain and mistrust. This is not 1972, but I don't know how to make it go away. There is a legacy of harm, and in the big picture this is not so long ago. Some people experienced real trauma and we can't make it go away. I'm not qualified to fix it.

Administrator

Staff and community participants in both communities talked about the lack of parent support and participation at school board AGMs and at parent-teacher meetings. Some people talked about how some families are unable to meet the basic needs of their children due to social problems like addictions or poverty. There was discussion about how some of these families are also unable to support their children to go to school. Parents may lack the confidence or the skills to address issues with the school when they arise. They may not understand the school system, and do not have an education or knowledge to help their children with their schooling or homework.



Kids are not doing so well because their families don't treat them good, don't look after them well, feed them, clothe them and drive them to school. Kids who don't get that are not very happy.

Elder

Teachers want to help the kids, but kids have problems that come from the parents. I was a very heavy drinker before and my kids were acting out at night, drinking, committing crimes. My daughter neglect her children. I stop drinking. I went to camp with my family and in one month my kids stopped doing bad things. Parents are role models. When kids have problems, teachers call the parents and the parents point fingers.

Parent

People from both Natuashish and Sheshatshiu said the communities did not do enough to welcome teachers and invite them to community events. Some teachers said they felt like outsiders, like they were not accepted or wanted in the community, while other teachers and community members said the teachers themselves had to make more of an effort to get to know people in the communities. People in Sheshatshiu talked about how there is little relationship between the community and non-Innu teachers because most of them live outside of Sheshatshiu.

Parents and community should have a chance to give their input. For too many years teachers keep to themselves; they don't get involved in community activities. I tell teachers to get to know the community, become part of our activities, they have their own activities but they need to mix with the community.

Leader



I respect everyone although I don't know the teachers, but I'd like to see them to be friends with the Innu in the community. It's partly our fault. They invite us to school and we don't go. Sometimes they talk to me from the window. Teachers need to spend a couple of weeks in the country with the children.

Elder

The school board needs to let teachers know they're doing a great job, compliment them, how they're working hard, so they don't burn out or get so tired.

Parent

Some people said the divide between the school and the community was cultural, and that even with Mamu Tshishkutamashutau, the school had yet to be transformed into an Innu school. Some talked about how stereotyping gets in the way of relationships. Teachers come to the community with preconceived ideas of who the Innu are from what they've heard in the media, and Innu also have stereotypical ideas of who White people are.

What are we doing here? The Innu took over control, but do they really have control? Do they really have any say or are we continuing with the same methods, just different personnel? How much is the education process meaningful to the Innu? I detest assimilation. People use assimilation language like it's a good thing, but it removes the spirit of a people.

Teacher

People have preconceived notions of what the other is thinking or where they're coming from. The teachers think we're all the same. Parents have their own unresolved issues about the system, notions of who the Akaneshau teacher is. We need to cross the bridge. People who don't know me think I'm a typical Innu who doesn't understand. Once they get to know me they treat me differently. We need to see each person individually and get to know them... We need a system where everyone is invited and valued.

Parent

My son went to nutshimit with his grandparents. When he went back to school I saw his report card and he was marked as absent. He told me not to bother with it. He said he went to school in nutshimit. He was taught biology in nutshimit although there was no paperwork. When a non-Innu cuts up an animal that is biology. His grandparents taught him and he observed how to cut up the caribou. The boy said to me: "Why is the school called an Innu school when I get marked absent when I went to the country."

Parent



Suggestions and recommendations

People shared many ideas and opinions about what needs to happen for the community and parents to become more involved in the school. Many people said there needs to be more communication and that both sides need to make more of an effort to work together. Some people said the school needs to communicate the positive things that are happening to the school, not just the challenges they face. Parents said they would like to be contacted as soon as a problem arises before it becomes serious. School staff and community participants talked about how parents and the communities need more information about how the education system works. A number of people recommended holding a truth and reconciliation process to help heal the division between the school and community.

We need to get parents more involved. If you go to one parent, let them know how their kid is doing well in school – that will get parents open to getting involved. Parents only come to school when kids do something negative. Teachers and CAs should call the parents when the kids do something good. The community and parents also need to focus on the positive things, not just complaints about the school. We need to change attitudes. We need people to see that there are positive things happening in the school.

Trustee

They should just have parents called, tell the children that their parents will be called. Parents need to think of kids first and make sure their kids go to school and behave. School needs more support from parents.

Student

People need to heal the school and teachers, to come together to heal. They need reconciliation. People need to talk about what happened to them. They need to go deeper and get beyond their anger.

Health worker

There were a number of suggestions about what parents/ guardians or the community could do to support the school. Many people talked about how parents/ guardians' need to take a greater interest in their children's education and future. People talked about how communities could do more to help raise funds for events such as school trips or trips to nutshimit, as well as for extra-curricular activities, a breakfast program in Sheshatshiu and basic school supplies. Some people said trust funds could also be used for education. A number of people said community leaders



need to lobby governments for more funding for the schools. Some said leaders need to made education a priority and allocate funding accordingly.

Families need to talk to their kids more about education. We live in both worlds. We have to adapt to the Kakeshau world, encourage kids to be more open, to be whatever they want. Others have done it and everyone can do it.

Parent

Parents have to take their kids to the school, walk him to the door, make the kid feel they're loved. Get them up, make breakfast ready, give them a bath, buy them new clothes. Parents should go sliding, skating, fishing; do things with your kids. Talk to them, show them things, send them to school. Be nice. Tell them to do their writing good. Kids need love.

Elder

Parents need to support the school, talk to their kids. They should go to the school and see what their kids are doing, how they're acting. They don't believe what their kids are doing. Parents need to stay in the classroom with their kids.

Parent

Other suggestions for doing outreach and increasing community engagement and communication include:

- set up a parent-school association led by the community
- set up regular public meetings about the school, as opposed to one AGM
- regular school visits by trustees
- have parents volunteer to help out at the school, like with breakfast and lunch programs or with extra-curricular activities

- invite parents to visit their children’s classrooms
- social events, such as family days, class celebrations, a school carnival, talent shows, science fair and heritage fairs and other holiday concerts like the Christmas concert
- organize class reunions, view old pictures of the school
- make the opening and closing of the school each year a community event
- have school staff, like the community liaisons, go door-to-door
- allow more access to the school for community events, like use of the gym (and cafeteria in Sheshatshiu) for sports, fitness, meetings, dances and other social events
- more leadership from administrators to foster communication with the community
- encourage families whose children are going to school in Goose Bay or North West River to return to the Sheshatshiu Innu school



I attend meetings to talk about the school, but kids are not allowed. Kids have to have their own meeting with the elders to talk about what they want for the school. It's important for parents to get together and talk about the school, no leaders, talk about how they could help the school and the community.

Elder

The community and parents need to get more involved with everything happening in school. Teachers and parents need to sit down and talk. We need parent-teacher meetings so teachers can know where the kids are coming from. Parents can learn what the teachers are trying to do. They can learn from each other.

Leader

The teachers with the CAs, the principal and vice-principals with parents should get together to talk about how to make the school better. This should happen 4 times a year. Those who come to the meetings, 4 or 5 families, that is a lot and the next meeting, more will probably come. Unless we work together as a community, nothing will make the school better.

Elder

We need to be more involved in the life of students, families, the community. We can go up to the grandparents and say, "Tell Johnny to finish those two assignments so he can graduate."

Teacher

Get parents and teachers to socialize, not just meet and greet, but get to know each other. Have a family day at school. I saw it in the movies, the student brings in their hero in class and explains why that person is the kid's hero. One kid could bring the nurse. Another kid could bring someone who taught them how to make moccasins.

Parent

A number of people in both communities had ideas of how the schools could work more with community organizations. They could regularly invite health workers to talk about sex education or addictions workers to talk about alcohol and drugs. The RCMP could be invited to present their programs. The schools could team up with NGG, the Family Resource Centre and recreation staff on extra-curricular programs. Artists and musicians could be invited to visit the schools. The schools could also work with cultural programs, like the walks, programs at Kamestatin, or Tony Penashue’s program in Sheshatshiu. This partnership could be especially helpful for troubled or high-risk children and youth. The schools also need to coordinate efforts with CYFS in addressing issues of children in care.

Another suggestion was for the school to invite leaders to talk about their work, about the history of land rights, the Tshash Petapan agreement, and how the Innu need to educate themselves for self-government. Band Council and Innu Nation leaders as well as program directors could talk to the children about getting an education to become not only leaders but also financial officers, teachers, dentists, wildlife officers, police officers, trades people, etc.

A number of people talked about how a strong relationship between Innu and non-Innu staff at the school would serve as a foundation to build a better relationship between the



school and the community. The relationship between teacher and CAs can be key to classroom success and connecting with the community and parents. Recruiting teachers who were interested in learning about the Innu culture was cited as important. School staff and community members both suggested that teacher orientations should involve time on the land where teachers could learn about the culture and get to know people. It was suggested that teacher or staff orientations at the beginning of the year should include team-building and cross-cultural sensitivity. Experienced teachers, Innu staff and community resources should be involved in teacher orientations.

First thing in the orientation: pass out to teachers stuff from CBC news: what do think of the propaganda that is all so negative. You need to set them straight, get rid of the warped view, the limited negative views of this community.

Administrator

We need to be more hospitable. Teachers should participate in camping trips to the country. When we did this, the kids could show the teachers what they knew in the country. I showed my teacher how to put up a tent, build a fire. It made me feel important. This was a highlight. I never forgot that. People see how much people work. For 3 years we took kids to Mistastin Lake. Teachers found out it wasn't a vacation to go in the country.

Leader

A few people said that communication between the school and the community needs to be improved. Teachers and CAs needed training to learn how to speak to parents and how to resolve conflict. Some people said school administrators needed to be more proactive in resolving conflict amongst school staff and with community members. Some talked about how school staff, as well as parents/ guardians, need to put aside personal issues and focus on the needs of the children. A number of people talked about the need for follow-through on issues and to continue to communicate until the conflict has been resolved.

Talking to parents is very important, even if people get offended. The school should keep trying. Write a letter if they don't show up.

Parent



To make the school better the staff can do one thing: COMMIT. But we can't make any commitments to stay without support from the community, ergo the community needs to put all their bad feelings towards 'outsiders' aside, move on from the past and focus on making the future better for the children. Commitment from staff, parents, community members is equally important; one is no good without the other.

Teacher

In Sheshatshiu the suggestion was made to provide housing for teachers to increase opportunities for teachers to develop a relationship and connection with the community.



3.7 Curriculum and programs

While many people said they wanted more Innu curriculum, many also said they recognized the importance of the children learning the Newfoundland and Labrador curriculum. Educators talked about their efforts and successes in delivering this curriculum and raising the standard of education in both schools. Some parents also shared comments about how the standards have been raised in recent years. Teachers in Sheshatshiu talked about the technological resources at their disposal to help them teach, some of which have been accessed through the trust fund.

I see a difference in the kids since we got the new school; the kids seem a lot happier. It feels like they're learning a lot more than we did: compared to the old school. My daughter seems to be a lot smarter, getting 80s and 90s. The quality of the teaching is better.

Parent

Last year at the beginning of the year kids were failing math and by the end the lowest mark was a 70 for those kids who were actually attending... We have 40 students in the high school who attend regularly... Kids are coming up stronger academically. There were a lot of interventions in 4, 5, and 6 in the reading programs. This peer group in the high school values school.

Teachers

Despite these comments, educators also expressed concerns about the relevance or feasibility of delivering the provincial curriculum and students and parents/guardians were also concerned about the standard of the education. Parents/guardians and students from both communities wondered why students did not get homework.

I wish that the school was not so behind, that we had the same education, learned the same things as other schools, and I think the students would pass the tests. I think that's why I'm dropping out, but I still go to school to get my assignments. The assignments are easy. You go to the textbook and you find the answer and just write it down. I want my brain to be challenged. I went to school the first day then I slowly stopped going.

Student

It's not learning the content that is important but learning how to learn. Those are the skills they need.

Teacher

Teachers and administrators talked about the challenges of trying to deliver the provincial curriculum. Many talked about the language barrier – how the schools are essentially ESL (English as a Second Language) schools, and how teachers and students cannot understand each other particularly if there is no CA. There was concern that some children arrive at school with poor language development in both English and Innu-aimun. Both school staff and parents talked about how children move up through the grades without acquiring the foundation they need in English to follow the NL curriculum. Some said students drop out because of their lack of English. There were differing opinions about whether students should have a strong foundation in Innu-aimun before learning English.

If they need to be able to read and write English at Grade level, then no, they are not. This is not because of a lack of quality of teaching they are getting, but due to the many disadvantages they are saddled with, the first one being ENGLISH IS THEIR SECOND LANGUAGE!!! We cannot hold them to the same standard as the 'outside' world, who are all English-speaking.

Teacher

Some talked about how too many theoretical models behind the provincial curriculum did not apply in Innu communities. As discussed in the section on culture, much of the teaching that goes on in the schools is contrary to the Innu way of learning through observation. Some people talked about the lack of classes such as art and music, over and above the core curriculum, to appeal to high school students. A number of teachers talked about the lack of relevant curriculum that reflects life in a northern Innu community, although some teachers talked about adapting curriculum.



The kids are full of vim and vigor when they're small and as they go up through the grades they become less confident because we're trying to force round pegs into square holes.

Teacher

A number of school staff expressed concerns about the lack of resources for students with special needs. This includes a lack of assessments and diagnosis as well as a lack of special education teachers and materials. This issue was also raised by parents and guardians, particularly regarding the lack of funding or resources to address FASD, or for children with the most challenging needs. There was also discussion about how to meet the needs of students who excel when there are so many demands from students with special needs.

Teachers had a number of comments about reading and literacy programs. While some talked about the success they've experienced with existing programs, others expressed concerns. Some said there were too many changes with the reading programs. Some talked about the lag in introducing new programs and accessing the program books and resources. In Sheshatshiu people said the library was being underutilized.

When we implemented the literacy programs, we tried it for one year and stop the next one, or in the middle of the year. Every year there's a brand new program. They don't give us a chance to see if the program works before they introduce a new one. There's no consistency. Kids are confused and they are wasting funding.

Teachers

There was discussion from both school staff and community participants about student performance and assessments. Educators talked about how students in the two schools have scored low on provincial CRTs (Criterion Reference Tests) because of the language barrier. Some said these tests are not adequate tools to assess Innu students and others said it is important to measure efforts to improve academic standards. Others said these assessments challenge teachers to improve their teaching. In Sheshatshiu there was more talk among educators about the importance of teaching to the curriculum and achieving outcomes.

We are putting a strong emphasis on building basic skills in primary, and the baseline set of skills are improving dramatically. What we're trying to do is to make sure kids in



primary are getting the requisite skills to move on to elementary... I can't wait to see how these kids from pre-kindergarten who are coming to school earlier will perform. Our very first group in grade 3 will be writing the CRTs this year.

Administrator

A number of people talked about the importance of extra-curricular activities. School staff, parents and teachers all talked about how these help keep children in school and how children learn a lot through these activities. However, parents in both communities expressed concerns that too much class time was spent on extra-curricular activities such as watching movies, sports and playing on computers.

We're able to do sports meets. We have a fall meet and a winter meet. Before only north coast schools participated in these. I argued with the Labrador School Board to have Sheshatshiu kids. There's a Lab-a-thon, northern games, volleyball, floor hockey, skiing, snowshoeing, running. We see improvements in their performance. At first the kids weren't winning anything. We've won the sportsmanship award for two years.

Administrator

It's good that everybody gets involved in sports, but I think it's too much. They need to spend more time on books, rather than the whole day in the gym - 3 times a week is enough. At the same time they need to get out of their chairs and exercise: it's good for their attention. Extra-curricular activities outside the school are good.

Trustee



cognitive skill-building, etc. in their own language first and gradually (maybe even simultaneously) begin to learn to read and write in English. Students learning to read in their native language first will eliminate feelings of failure that so many students feel when they are not able to master the English language.

Teacher

People had a number of specific suggestions regarding curriculum and programming: (Recommendations for Innu curriculum and programs are included in the section on Innu-aimun and culture.)

- classes in religion or spirituality
- art classes for all grades
- drama classes
- health classes on mental health, alcohol and addictions, sexual health and nutrition
- governance and self-government
- more music, including choirs
- public speaking
- extra-curricular programs after school for grades 3 – 12: hockey, volleyball, self-esteem program, movie nights, cooking classes, crafts
- ABE classes at night
- a photography class
- develop programs to air on community radio

School should teach girls and boys about sex education. The girls get pregnant and it makes it harder to finish high school or to go back later. Kids have more opportunities if they are single.

Leader

They should teach more about health issues, like about stress, what it can do to the body, how it can create sickness, and about diabetes, FASD.

Parent

A number of people had recommendations about what was required to improve the standard of education. Educators, parents and students all said there should be a greater emphasis on language development. Many talked about the need for students to become proficient in reading and writing English. Some people said a focus on developing Innu-aimun in the lower grades would help students learn English as well. Both parents and educators thought assessments could help raise the standard and challenge teachers to work harder to achieve the desired student outcomes. Parents and students from both communities suggested there should be more homework, as well as tutoring for students who need help.

It would be fun if they had more new books. Some kids would go to the library and read. I love to read. They need to do more work to help kids learn to write in English.

Student

English is a second language here. What we need to do is turn this weakness (which it will always be if we continue to model ourselves after a traditional NL school) into a strength. We need an INNU reading program for K-3, so they can meet expectations in comprehension/ making connections/



3.8 Governance and administration

The strengths

The school now belongs to the community. It's good to have Innu control over our education.

Parent

A number of people, including leaders, trustees, parents, administrators and teachers, talked about the establishment of an Innu school board as a strength. People had praise for those who were involved in devolution, people like Daniel Ashini, as well as trustees who continue to work on changing the school to better meet the needs of Innu children. Some commended existing board members for their dedication, for showing a “genuine interest” in the schools and not shying away from difficult issues. Some people said an Innu school board was able to be more responsive to the education needs of Innu communities.

The school board has come a long way in four years. The first year we started with no payroll, paper, pencils, or computers.

Administrator

I like that the board is made up of Innu from both communities. They can relate to the students better than a provincial board, understand the culture. They are sensitive to what's going on in the community.

Parent

As an independent school district we can implement these different programs. We are the experts and we meet with the trustees to bring them on board. In a school board with 22 schools, it would be impossible for different schools to be trying out these new programs.

Administrator

The achievements of Mamu Tshishkutamashutau identified by consultation participants include: teacher recruitment and retention, the development of Innu curriculum, professional development and staff training, as well as accountability.

Some people said a strength of both schools was having a large staff and small class sizes. The selection and retention of good teachers was identified as a strength in both communities. Particularly in Sheshatshiu there is a high number of returning teachers, although in Natuashish participants said the core group of returning teachers there is growing from year to year. Some people said it was

good to have Innu in administrative positions. Hiring couples and friends, and providing incentives were cited as helping with teacher retention.

There is a very caring staff, a lot of teachers returning. In the four years I've been here, it's the best staff ever.

Administrator

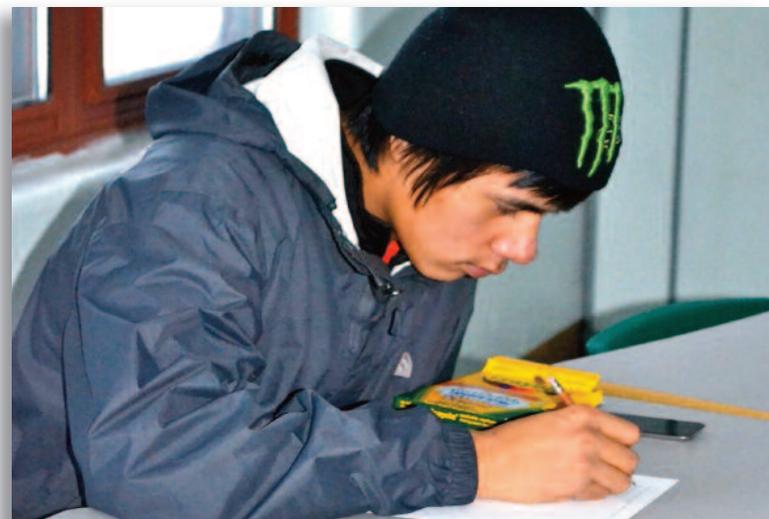
Now we have not so much turnover of staff, there is a core group of returning staff, this is a good thing. We are looking at what the Labrador School Board is doing to keep their teachers and matching it, like offering a Labrador allowance and lower rent.

Trustee

Teachers in both communities were positive about the professional development offered by the school board. In Sheshatshiu teachers specifically talked about how they have been able to put into practice some of the learnings from the sessions on collaborative teaching. In terms of accountability people mentioned school board AGMs (Annual General Meetings) and other meetings as opportunities for people to express their concerns and wishes for the school and their children's education.

The Challenges

Consultation participants identified a number of challenges relating to governance and administration, including: governance structure, communication, recruitment and selection of staff, personnel issues, professional development and capacity building, meeting the separate needs of the two communities, and engaging the community.



First thing we do is takeover the school, make it Innu-run, but we're still in the baby stages. We're learning from our first steps. We need to explore these mistakes and not do them again. People don't realize all the work that needs to be done. We want people to know that there are a lot of problems. Trustees have a lot of issues to deal with.

Trustee

With the administration, whoever the principal is, it seems like it's the board of the trustees who are making decisions – people making decisions about the school when they don't know what's going on here. The principal needs to have decision-making... Issues don't get resolved here because one party says it's a school board decision, the other party says it's the school's decision.

Teachers

Governance structure:

Some people talked about how governance issues in the community affect the school board and school administration. There was some discussion about school board trustees being political appointments, and whether they were selected for their abilities or because of their relationship to community leaders. People in Natuashish spoke of the high turnover of trustees because of frequent band elections and new leadership. There was talk about how the high turnover also does not allow trustees to gain experience and knowledge they need to do a good job.

Decision-making:

A number of people expressed concerns about how decisions get made both at the school board and school levels. People wondered whether school board staff, trustees, the school director or school administrators made decisions? Some people said too many key decisions were made at the school board level.

Board gets too involved in the operations of the school, interfering with administration. They are here two days a month and making big decisions.

Teacher

School staff and community participants talked about the lack of policies and procedures to guide decision-making and practice. Some talked about how existing policies are not enforced consistently. School staff said there was a lack of input from administrators, teachers and Innu staff in policy, budget, hiring and programming decisions. People in both communities expressed concerns about decisions being overruled by political interference. Some people talked about how schools must still follow the provincial standards regulations and requirements and how decision-making is still not really in the hands of the Innu.

When something bad happens, we don't know how to deal with it.

Classroom Assistants

School staff in Natuashish expressed concerns that decisions made by the board did not reflect the different realities of the two communities. They said the school board needed to look more closely at the specific needs of Natuashish. One concern expressed by a number of people in Sheshatshiu, including school staff, parents and students was about decisions regarding school closures. The Sheshatshiu school closes far more frequently than other schools in the region. Teachers in Sheshatshiu also spoke about frequent early dismissals. In Natuashish concerns were expressed about children missing school when they were sent home because there are no supply teachers.

Communication:

A number of people talked about the lack of communication between the board and the school staff and students, as well as the communities. Some people talked about how AGMs are poorly attended, although they recognized the efforts of the board to report back to the communities. In both communities, but especially in Sheshatshiu, parents shared stories about taking issues to the board and getting no response or no satisfactory response. Some teachers as well said they had raised concerns with the school board and never received a response. Teachers also talked about the lack of communication between the administration and other school staff.



When there's an outbreak of lice or scabies, there's no public health notice or it takes days to get it... One student had a life and death situation. The information was not passed on to the teacher from the principal. We only learned about it after the fact from the public health nurse... If a child is apprehended by CYFS, we don't know if they're in care, who the guardian is. On 3 occasions this year, kids were gone. I had to go track them down.

Teachers

Staffing and personnel issues:

A number of people talked about staffing and personnel issues. People talked about challenges related to the selection and retention of staff. Some people had concerns that the people selecting school staff are not educators. Some talked about the problem of hiring teachers with no experience in a First Nations community. Concerns specific to Innu staff included: selection by political appointments rather than for their skills and experience; the high turnover rate especially in Natuashish, and the lack of training or capacity.

We have teachers just coming out of university to an isolated community, with no experience and then they quit before December. One teacher lasted three days. Teachers need to know what they are coming to.

Parent

In both communities teachers expressed concerns about contracts: that they did not have one, their contract was not binding, or they were expected to do work outside their contract. Many teachers expressed concerns that they are not members of a union and had no recourse when they had issues with an administrator or the school board. Some teachers said this creates a climate of fear amongst teachers.

A number of people talked about the role of Innu staff and CAs. People wondered about job descriptions. They talked about how the role of CAs could vary from one classroom to the next. Some worked as co-teachers, other as interpreters or translators, while the function of other CAs was primarily as "bouncers or disciplinarians." Some people expressed concerns that the input of Innu staff was not sought or valued enough, and that some were not given the opportunity to contribute as much as they could. In Natuashish people talked about how CAs get switched from one class to another and never get to know a class to build a relationship with the children. In Sheshatshiu there was discussion about how Innu teachers have to develop their own materials as well as teach.



Other teachers have department of education learning resources and programs at their fingertips. Innu staff have to develop their own materials – a major challenge especially for level 2 certified teachers. People with masters in curriculum development are working on this full time, but our teachers are trying to teach and develop materials as well. And they're being asked by trustees to do more.

Administrator

People talked about the lack of policy, procedures and consistency in dealing with personnel issues, including issues such as: staff missing too many days of work, poor work performance, a negative attitude, not following the code of ethics, and selling drugs in school. Both Innu and non-Innu staff thought they were treated differently by administration. Some people said there was a lack of discipline and some staff should be replaced. Some people talked about how political interference from some leaders has undermined the efforts of administrators to deal with personnel issues. School staff and community members talked about the lack of staff evaluations or performance appraisals for teachers, Innu staff and administrators. Longstanding conflicts and the inability of teachers and CAs to work together were also discussed by school staff and community participants.

Too many things are left to fester because of empathy for teachers and staff. They call in sick and then you see them at the airport getting on a plane. They need to be more disciplined. They're not following policies. This is a small community. They shouldn't talk negative. They need a positive attitude and to abide by a code of ethics... Teachers who cause trouble have been brought back year after year.

Administrator

One of the biggest struggles is staff not getting along. If one staff member is unhappy they collect amongst themselves. The negativity moves around instead of saying how can we change the negative into a positive. Problems are mostly between the Innu and non-Innu staff.

Administrator

As discussed in the section on school climate, some staff in both schools are having difficulties dealing with stress or mental health issues such as depression and addictions. People expressed concerns about how this impacts their work and whether administrators or the school board are addressing these issues. Some people also said these staff are not taking responsibility to deal with their issues.

There is a major problem with some CAs. Some have drug problems, some teachers have addictions problems too. I know; kids must know too. It's hard for kids to respect adults who are not role models.

Leader

Teachers are missing too much school. Innu staff are gone again. Maybe the teachers are sick. This is the second day, all the grade 3 students were sent home.

Elder

Finances:

The school board's finances were discussed by consultation participants. Some said that the schools are underfunded, especially in communities with so many needs. Some people talked about this as a broader issue for First Nations schools across Canada and the need for the AFN and First Nations leaders to lobby for more funding. Some people, including teachers in both schools, expressed concerns about budget decisions and how funding is allocated or managed by the board. Teachers complained about the lack of incentives for working in northern and isolated schools. They talked about the lack of northern allowance, lower wages, limited travel and moving expenses, and having to choose between a pension plan and a round trip flight home.

In Manitoba or Alberta, they pay the teacher's travel all the way from home at the beginning of the year. Here they only pay from Goose Bay. Before teachers even show up here, they are up to \$7-8000 in the hole so they start unhappy.

Teacher

People in Natuashish spoke about inequalities they saw between the two schools. Teachers talked about how Sheshatshiu has a number of advantages over Natuashish, including a bigger staff – more CAs and administrators, supply teachers, as well as more resources such as a staff room, computers, smart boards and ipads.

Teachers expressed concerns about certain expenditures, such as hosting a UFC fighter or the Wunderbolt circus when they lack basic supplies such as pencils, paper and textbooks. Other concerns regarding financial decisions include:

- a lack of library books, calculators and art supplies
- a lack of substitute teachers
- a lack of funding for children with disabilities and other special needs
- limited photocopying in Sheshatshiu when textbooks are unavailable
- no funding for 24-hour security in Natuashish to prevent break-ins
- the purchase of an FASD remediation program that was not useful

Capacity-building:

As discussed in other sections, the lack of certified Innu teachers was identified as a priority issue. As well both Innu and non-Innu school staff talked about the lack of professional development opportunities. Some teachers



said that professional development sessions offered by the school board were not always relevant or useful. Some teachers talked about previous professional development sessions being provided by resource people with no experience working in Innu communities.

The Recommendations

Governance:

Some people talked about how good governance at the school board level will happen when the communities achieve good governance at the Band Council and Innu Nation level. Leaders talked about how they are developing an election code and building capacity to improve governance in both communities. Regarding school board governance, people talked about holding elections for school board positions, rather than through political appointment. Some people said trustees should be selected through an interview process where they could demonstrate their interest and knowledge of education. Some people proposed that experienced or retired Innu school staff should serve as trustees. A number of people said the school board should include both school and community members. Some people suggested that trustees undergo training on governance and the education system. A suggestion was also made that the schools could start teaching good governance.

Decision-making:

A number of people talked about how the lines of decision-making needed to be more clearly defined and understood. There was some discussion about the need for a more collaborative approach to decision-making that would involve more input from school staff and the community. In particular, some people said that existing Innu staff should have more input and participation in how the school is run. Some people talked about the need to keep politics out of school board and school decisions. School staff as well as community participants said there should be clear policies and procedures to guide decision-making. One specific suggestion was a clear policy to avoid conflict of interest situations with school staff or trustees.

The school board should make decisions on bigger issues but there should be more autonomy and decision-making on the local level.

Teacher



Communication:

Many people talked about the need for more or better communication between all parties: amongst school staff, between staff and students, between staff and parents/guardians, between the school and the school board, and the school board and the community. One suggestion was to develop a formal complaints process for community members to bring their issues to the schools and school board.

School staff need more communication with trustees. We organized a meeting with the staff to talk about the issues. There was a lot of tension amongst staff. Trustees could initiate more communication with the community and the school, to help build the bridge. It's important to have meetings between trustees and staff, to hear what the issues are, and for staff to know they will be addressed.

Trustee

The school needs trustees visible in the school, helping out with breakfast, witnessing the problems first hand, seeing what children are constantly causing a disturbance and then working with the staff to contact parents and whoever else (community psychologist, healing lodge, etc) to try and remedy the problem.

Teacher

We should have a 3-day forum to bring the school and the community together, to talk about all the issues: like bullying, to document what people are saying, what we should do. People will learn about the school, about how we can work together, how the school could work with the Family Resource Centre and other community organizations.

Health worker





Staffing and personnel issues:

People had a number of suggestions regarding the recruitment and selection of school staff, as well as dealing with personnel issues. A recommendation made by school staff was to have an educator or experienced teacher involved in the hiring process. While there was broad consensus that there was a need for more trained Innu staff, a number of people argued that schools should also have some non-Innu staff.

They need to hire the right people, not political appointments. The jobs need to be advertised with a job description and the best person selected. We need to keep politics out of school. We need to hire the right person with the best education and skills.

Administrator

The teachers don't all need to be Innu, then the school would not be as rich. They need to have teachers from Montreal, the Philippines, Africa, but they need mostly Innu staff.

Parent

Other recommendations regarding staffing include:

- more special needs personnel
- Innu staff in every classroom
- a counselor or social worker to work with troubled students
- an administrator or supervisor of CAs to support them and help them work as a team
- consistent discipline and follow-through of staff for serious offences or poor job performance

Regarding personnel issues a number of people said a more positive approach needed to be used to discipline staff. Teachers and community participants wanted to see staff, including administrators, undergo regular performance evaluations. Some people said that staff with personal or mental health issues needed support to heal rather than be disciplined or fired.

Finances:

School staff and teachers in particular had a number of recommendations regarding the buildings and resources that are not discussed in other sections and have financial implications. These include: the need for extensions, larger classrooms, and recreational facilities like a playground and soccer field. In Natuashish people talked about the need for a staff room, a cafeteria, a bus service, and building a high school separate from the primary and elementary school. The need for more classrooms is particularly urgent in Natuashish where two classrooms are without windows and a fire hazard. In Sheshatshiu there were many requests for a breakfast and lunch program. Requests for more library resources was mentioned in both schools as well as more funding for basic supplies.

Capacity building:

A number of recommendations regarding capacity were specific to Innu staff. School and community participants talked about the capacity needs of CAs. Some suggested CAs be assessed to find out their training needs and a program be developed to meet these needs. Innu teachers said they needed upgrading or refresher courses. The need for more certified Innu teachers was expressed by many people. Some said the school board and the community needed to do more to encourage and recruit Innu people to become teachers, including male teachers. The need to train Innu to work in administrative positions was also discussed. Band Councils should provide incentives for people to study education. Some people talked about the need for a university Innu teacher training program that is up to standard, while others wanted a more flexible or accelerated approach. The need to offer this program in the communities was expressed by some CAs. There were also suggestions to provide on-the-job training or an apprenticeship program that would pair CAs with experienced teachers.



I envision CAs as co-teachers, take the information the teacher is trying to convey, if the kid is stuck because of the language or translation, the CA can facilitate. We need to provide them with opportunities to be more involved with the content.

Teacher

From K to grade 3 should be taught all in Innu. We have people from here who could do this with some training. They wouldn't necessarily need to meet all the requirements.

Leader

We need to have teacher training in the form of apprenticeships. An Innu apprentice shadows a teacher for 4 years and gets their education degree. The teacher gets a masters degree. The Innu way of learning is watching and watching, trying things out with some supervision until it's mastered. Give them a chance.

Administrator

With regards to non-Innu teachers, people said they need better orientations and professional development in cross-cultural sensitivity and Innu culture and language. These sessions should involve local resources: elders and Innu staff. Some teachers wanted the school board to arrange for their participation in Labrador School Board professional development sessions. There was some discussion about how the school board could make use of experienced staff who understand the schools better than outside specialists. Some people said specialists should draw on local knowledge. Teachers said they wanted professional development on: how to work with children struggling with addictions, suicide and other serious challenges; as well as in literacy, art/drama therapy, and Innu culture and history. One suggestion was for the school board to survey existing staff to find out their professional development needs. Some people said there was a need for training in self-care and stress management.



3.9 The vision



People had many ideas to share about their dream school. They described a school where all the children attend regularly. There are many Innu teachers – trained, passionate and caring Innu teachers – and an Innu principal. The school is safe and welcoming for everyone.

In this vision Innu students are learning the best of both worlds. They are growing up proud of their Innu identity and equipped to pursue any career they like. All children have the opportunity to grow their talents and be set up for success. They are learning an Innu curriculum recognized by the province and at the same standard as any other school. Innu-aimun and culture are taught from kindergarten through high school both in school and nutshimit.

I see an elder sitting with the kids on the floor around while he is telling stories. Children are laughing at the elder's stories while they're doing crafts. Everyone is graduating. There is a celebration with the kids dressed in traditional clothing. The elder is playing the drum. Kids are graduating from primary, with an Innu education, dressed in Innu clothing. In high school, they have a graduation to celebrate completing the provincial education.

Parent

The community is very involved in this school of the future and people are working together. Families are encouraged to visit the school often. Members of the community volunteer and support a wide variety of extra-curricular activities that help develop the children's talents: art,

music, writing and drama; Innu skills and crafts and a variety of sports from hockey to gymnastics. Elders, community leaders, health workers, artists, and musicians are invited as resource people. School staff work with community organizations to support and help children facing difficulties. Everyone is there for the students. Teachers, students and community volunteers are celebrated for their achievements and hard work.

The students are graduating from high school. An elder is playing the drum at the community graduation celebrations. Graduates pursue their dreams, go on to college or university, come back to work on self-government and running their own community. Parents are proud of their children.

Every student would have an individual education plan, which was focused on the fulfillment of that child's potential. Perhaps she has a knack for art, or maybe he shows signs that he would make a good carpenter or mechanic. As the child grows, these talents would be developed in a way that ensures a place for him/her in the community. Those who demonstrate a natural talent for academia are put in a program that prepares them for university. Those who are more athletic spend most of their time developing their physical skills. Everyone is set up for success and, most importantly, they are supported not just by the school but also by their parents and their community. There is a strong sense of togetherness. There is a clear, shared vision of the future and everyone in the community does his or her part to ensure it is one day a reality.

Teacher

My vision is of an elite First Nation school. The students would be so busy trying to be their best that the teachers would be competing with each other to have the highest academic class in the country. The parents would be so busy fundraising and helping children prepare for study or sport. The Elders would be so happy waiting for the next class to arrive at their campsite overlooking a river and watching the salmon run or preparing the fire to clean the porcupine or having the caribou skin draped over the stick to clean it. In this school, kids would be immersed in the language and learn the way of land. A place to learn to walk in both cultures, learn to wear your moccasins and be that much closer to your academic dreams!

Parent

4.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This report does not provide the final word on schools in Natuashish and Sheshatshiu, but it should serve as a useful tool for the school board, the schools, and the communities to come together to plan for the future education of Innu children. A number of specific and practical recommendations are detailed earlier in this report. School success plans can incorporate many of these recommendations. Some recommendations speak to the schools, students and parents/guardians in their day-to-day lives and can be put into practice immediately.

Developing priority recommendations that respect the complexities of the issues is challenging and the way forward is to ensure that the children are at the heart of any proposed changes. Whether this community consultation process moves beyond words to action will depend on the efforts, courage and commitment of everyone: parents, school staff, students, school board staff and trustees, and community leaders to embrace the challenge and make education a priority.

Students have said what they want: a safe school; educators that care about them; to learn about who they are as Innu with programs that connect them with their language and culture; for adequate resources, like playgrounds, computers, a breakfast program and books; and access to classes and extra-curricular activities that cover the range of their interests and needs. Students want to succeed and be challenged. They want a quality of education that is the same as any other school in the province. They want more support from their parents and the communities. They want students, educators and parents to get along. The schools need to provide the children of Sheshatshiu and Natuashish with a learning environment that will meet their needs in a holistic way, equip them to achieve and open the door to a successful future.

When all the information gathered is considered, the following recommendations are proposed as priorities in developing school success plans:

1. School plans must focus on the children and ensure they all attend school. Children eager to go to school and learn are the school's greatest asset. Each child needs to feel valued and that s/he has a place in the school. A focus on children means putting an emphasis on getting children to school and keeping them in school until

they graduate. The children who are not in school are the most vulnerable. Schools must work with the communities, parents, leaders and organizations to find ways to get those children to school.

School success plans must include a strategy to increase attendance and retention of students. The schools need to be places where the children want to be. Existing efforts such as incentives and rewarding good attendance should continue, but a more systematic and targeted approach is needed to bring in every eligible child. This can include assigning more staff resources for continuous follow-through with parents/ guardians on student absences, offering catch-up or alternative programs for at-risk students with long absences, referring families and students to support organizations, organizing inter-agency meetings to address truancy, school and community-wide education on the importance of attendance, more arts-based programming in the high school, extra-curricular activities, state-of-the-art technology, classroom competitions for best attendance, mentoring and tutoring, acknowledging and crediting non-traditional learning, and ensuring students experience success and achievement.



2. Creating a safe and welcoming school climate needs to be a priority focus of school success plans. A positive school climate draws children to the school and is key to both teaching and learning. A school must have a culture of caring for its students, its staff and its community to ensure that positive relationships exist across the whole school. Everyone needs to feel accepted, valued and

welcomed. Many positive relationships between people were identified as a school strength. These need to be acknowledged and celebrated. They are the foundation to improving the school climate. People also talked about real challenges related to school climate, including bullying and fighting; student misbehaviour; unresolved conflict; staff morale and a lack of teamwork. At the heart of these issues are broken relationships both within and outside the school. A school success plan must include strategies to heal or restore these relationships.

The schools will need to dedicate time and resources to improving the school climate. Leadership needs to be more deliberate in facilitating greater communication, positive staff attitude and morale, as well as collaboration and teamwork in the school. Some excellent teamwork already exists amongst teachers. This needs to be expanded to include the whole school. Improving staff morale will involve building bridges between Innu and non-Innu staff, between teachers and CAs, administrators and other school staff. A more collaborative or democratic approach to decision-making would help foster teamwork. Professional development can help build this capacity across the whole of school personnel.



The schools should explore restorative justice practices to inform their plans to improve school climate, particularly in addressing bullying and other serious misbehaviour. Existing discipline measures such as suspensions and detentions are not working to address these problems.

Restorative justice practices are about building and restoring relationships. Behaviour is viewed more in terms of relationships than right and wrong, and incidents are seen as learning opportunities. Restorative practices involve the harmed, those causing harm and community members to put things right. The aim is to hold children who hurt others accountable for their actions through a talk-it-out approach, with meaningful consequences that restore damaged relationships, repair hurt feelings, and re-integrate these children into the social group. Good behaviour is achieved by supporting children who act out or bully. Children learn empathy, respect and acceptance as well as how to resolve conflict in a positive way.

Restorative practices can include circles, class meetings, bullying prevention, peer mediation, mentoring, anger management, youth substance programs, virtues and values education, and rewarding positive behaviour, kindnesses and courage. The approach deals with specific incidents and also fosters a positive climate in the classroom and throughout the school.

Restorative practices can also inform conflict resolution processes to address problems between adults both within and outside the school. Unresolved conflicts impact the school climate and restorative practices can contribute to reconciliation, collaborative problem-solving and more trusting relationships. The school can provide a model for the whole community demonstrating how conflict can be resolved, relationships healed and divisions bridged.

Capacity building or training of all professional and support staff will be an essential and important component to successfully implementing restorative practices in the schools. Existing human resources policies and procedures related to the code of conduct, conflict resolution, expectations, discipline and evaluation may need to be reviewed and revised to reflect new goals and practices.

Lack of communication was identified by many as a challenge for both schools. A communication plan should also help improve the school climate and be a focus of school plans. A communication plan should include strategies for improving both internal and external communication. As a starting point, this plan should include regular staff meetings and school assemblies.



3. The Innu culture must be recognized as an important asset in the school rather than a challenge. Innu values and culture should be well reflected in school plans. Fostering a strong Innu identity and pride is important to helping children grow into healthy and productive adults. Existing efforts to affirm and teach the culture, including Innu-aimun and Innu-eitun classes, crafts, curriculum development, cultural displays, tent classrooms and storytelling are a step in the right direction. More work needs to be done to ensure that Innu children are learning concepts and skills of the provincial curriculum with relevant content. The school board needs to continue to develop Innu curriculum as well as resources to help teachers integrate Innu content across the whole curriculum. The knowledge that students have as Innu needs to be measured and acknowledged. The community needs to be challenged to become more engaged in bridging the cultural divide between the school and community. Students need opportunities to learn about their culture on the land. This needs to be coordinated with the outpost and other community programs. If the communities believe this is important, they need to work with the schools to change the school calendar. Innu teacher training needs to be provided for young Innu and an accelerated program needs to be offered for committed CAs with a lot of classroom experience. The school board needs to hire non-Innu staff who are culturally friendly – open to learning more about Innu culture and traditions. This can happen through opportunities created with community members and through orientations and professional development that includes Innu resource people.

4. The schools need to further engage parents/guardians and the community in general. School staff need to build on existing efforts to engage parents, but more outreach is required. School staff need to be in regular contact by telephone, progress reports and home visits. Contact needs to occur not only when problems arise but also to relay positive information about student behaviour and accomplishments. Teachers need to understand the barriers parents may face in supporting their children in school. Conflict resolution and restorative practices should be implemented to help resolve conflicts between school staff and parents/guardians. These can also help to reconcile past injustices. While this type of outreach may seem like more work on an overburdened staff, an investment in building strong and trusting relationships with the community will help solve many problems that impede the ability of educators to do their



work. The schools also need to engage the communities more broadly, for example through inter-agency collaboration to address pressing issues such as bullying or truancy.

The schools also need an open door policy to bring the communities into the school. They need to work to make families feel welcome. The schools need to find ways to make the communities feel more ownership of their schools. Parents/guardians should be invited to their children's classrooms. Events such as family days, a school carnival, a heritage fair, class celebrations, feasts, and award ceremonies can bring the communities into the schools. They can become community hubs, offering sports or fitness activities or night classes in ABE, Innu-aimun, cooking or Innu history. Schools need to invite community resource people: representatives from various organizations, elders, school trustees, health workers, leaders, role models, artists, musicians, writers, filmmakers, hunters, business people, university graduates and tradespeople to share their skills, knowledge and stories with students and school staff. Non-Innu staff need to make an effort to be more involved in the communities.

A renewed relationship with the community can begin with the school plans. The process of developing the plans can involve administrators, teachers, Innu staff, students as well as elders, parents, leaders and other community members and agencies learning and working together. Community school councils could be set up to carry out this task. Through this process parents, elders and leaders can engage, know their input is important, be a part of the decision-making process, and buy into the plans.



5. School plans should focus on keeping good school staff. The core of caring and committed staff is an asset that needs to be further strengthened. School leadership, the school board and the communities need to recognize, nurture and support this staff to ensure they keep coming back. Concerns regarding the lack of involvement in decision-making, the lack of performance evaluations and feedback, contracts, the incentive package and the lack of a union should be addressed by the school board. The knowledge and experience of this staff needs to be mined: their input sought and valued. As well the school board should respond to requests for professional development, such as crisis intervention, how to work with troubled youth, and literacy for ESL students.

Teacher retention also requires recruiting teachers with experience or at least an openness or understanding of working in First Nations communities. Recruiting the wrong staff presents serious challenges to the whole school and results in staff leaving or being fired. When

they stay, they impact school morale. The selection process should involve experienced educators and Innu. New teachers need a handbook, orientations and professional development that provide information on working in Innu communities. Political appointments of Innu staff should be avoided and all Innu staff should go through a formal selection process. Innu staff need ongoing training. A school plan should include strategies to encourage Innu people, including existing committed staff, to study education and become certified teachers.

Personnel issues need to be addressed consistently. Staff adherence to the code of conduct, as well as the consistent enforcement of other human resources policies to ensure staff performance, achievement and well-being should factor in the school plans. Administrators need to work with the school board to ensure resources and support are available for staff to deal with stress, to take care of themselves and address mental health issues.

6. School plans need to include student achievement as a priority. Many people said expectations and standards need to be raised. At the same time all students need to be able to achieve and succeed, recognizing their individual or special needs and providing holistic support. Language development and literacy should be a goal of school plans, as well as core competencies in math, science and technology.

7. The school board and the schools need to work with leaders and the communities to make education a priority. School trustees need to be champions of education and need to be selected for their commitment to education. Schools need to work with leaders and elders to speak out about the importance of education. Leaders need to be involved in planning for the future and lobby for increased funding for the schools. Funding is required immediately for Innu teacher training. As well, existing schools cannot accommodate all potential students now and the population is growing quickly. Extensions are needed in the near future. If leaders are serious about self-government they also need to find and commit more funding for high school graduates to be able to continue their studies. These longer-term education needs need to be addressed in the school plans.



