

EDUCATION FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Canadian Provinces

Provinces have focussed on providing Canadians with universal access to quality education. For example, Saskatchewan Education provides financial and consultative support to 31 urban and 10 northern community schools in communities with significant Aboriginal populations and children and youth at risk primarily due to socio-economic conditions. The initiative has proven successful in meeting the needs of these populations by providing high-quality learning that is culturally affirming, academically challenging and includes early intervention. It also includes adult education in some parts of the province, parent and community involvement and integrated services and community development programming.

Saskatchewan's Integrated Services Program, introduced in 2000, is a successful approach for meeting the needs of the province's vulnerable children and youth. The program provides funding to schools and community partners that confer integrated supports for children and youth at risk of not succeeding in school or life. Three groups in particular are targeted: children and youth facing multiple risk factors; youth not attending school; and children and youth with emotional, behavioural and/or social problems.

British Columbia has adopted a number of strategies to improve access to post-secondary education. For instance, tuition fees have been frozen for five consecutive years; adult basic education is offered free of charge through the public school and post-secondary systems; almost 21 000 new student spaces have been created since 1996 at post-secondary institutions; three new universities have been established in the last decade; five universities have been created to improve regional access to undergraduate degrees; and increased core funding has been provided in 2001 to build and modernize provincial post-secondary institutions.

Institution-based training in British Columbia strengthens the role of post-secondary institutions by helping students who receive income assistance to acquire the skills necessary to move from economic dependence to independence. The program provides funds for British Columbia's colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions to integrate individuals receiving income assistance into their instruction programs as students. The funding provided for each post-secondary institution is in the order of \$150 000 to \$250 000.

In the 1998 Budget, the Government of Ontario announced the Access to Opportunities Program, to respond to the shortage of skilled high-tech professionals in the province. The Program has created 23 000 new places for students enrolled in high-technology programs in Ontario colleges and universities. To provide increased access to degree programs, Ontario is ensuring that students are protected from the risk of financial loss, that new degree programs at universities are of the highest quality and that private universities are able to operate within the province. A Quality Assessment Board, to be established early in 2001, will assess new degree programs offered in Ontario and by out-of-province institutions. In addition, the introduction of the Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund will create a permanent endowment of \$600 million to provide needs-based financial assistance to some 185 000 post-secondary students over the next 10 years.