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Making the Grade?

Education Trends in Northern Ontario

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- The research and analysis of:
 - » Existing and emerging policies relevant to Northern Ontario;
 - » Economic, technological and social trends which affect Northern Ontario;
- The formulation and advocacy of policies that benefit all Northern Ontario communities that include Aboriginal, Francophone, remote/rural communities, and urban centres; and,
- Other complementary purposes not inconsistent with these objectives.

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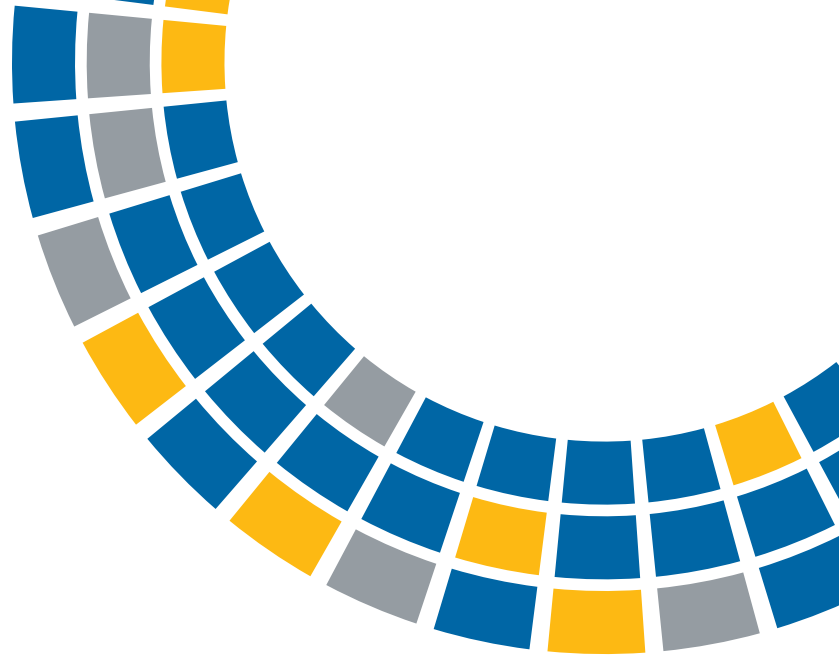
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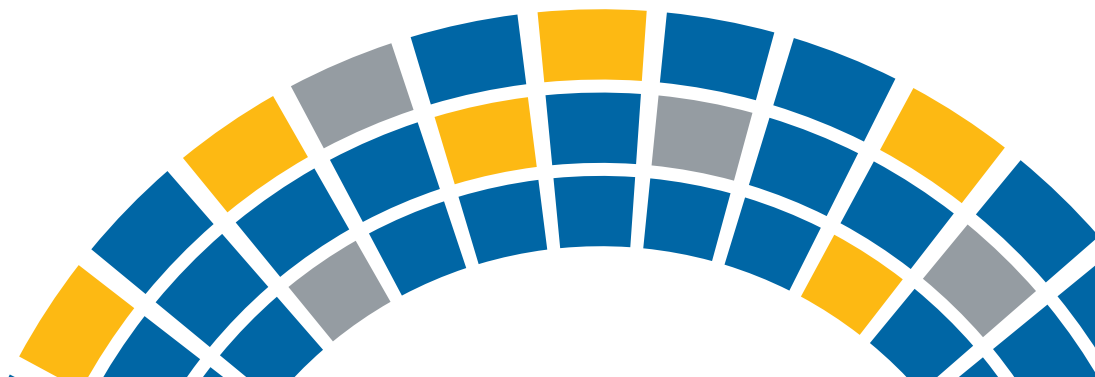
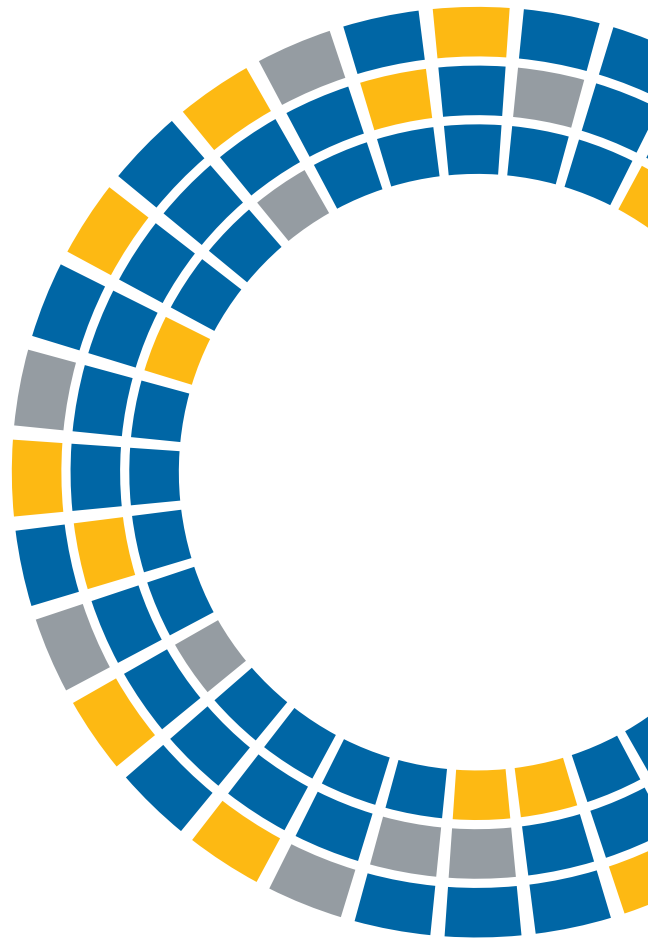
About the Author

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Dr. Mike Commito joined Northern Policy Institute as a policy analyst in June 2015. He has over seven years of experience in researching and writing about the history of natural resource management questions that affect northern Ontario, ranging from forestry to wildlife management.

Mike is a graduate of Laurentian University with a B.A. (2008) and a Masters (2010) in History. He recently completed his PhD in Canadian history from McMaster University.



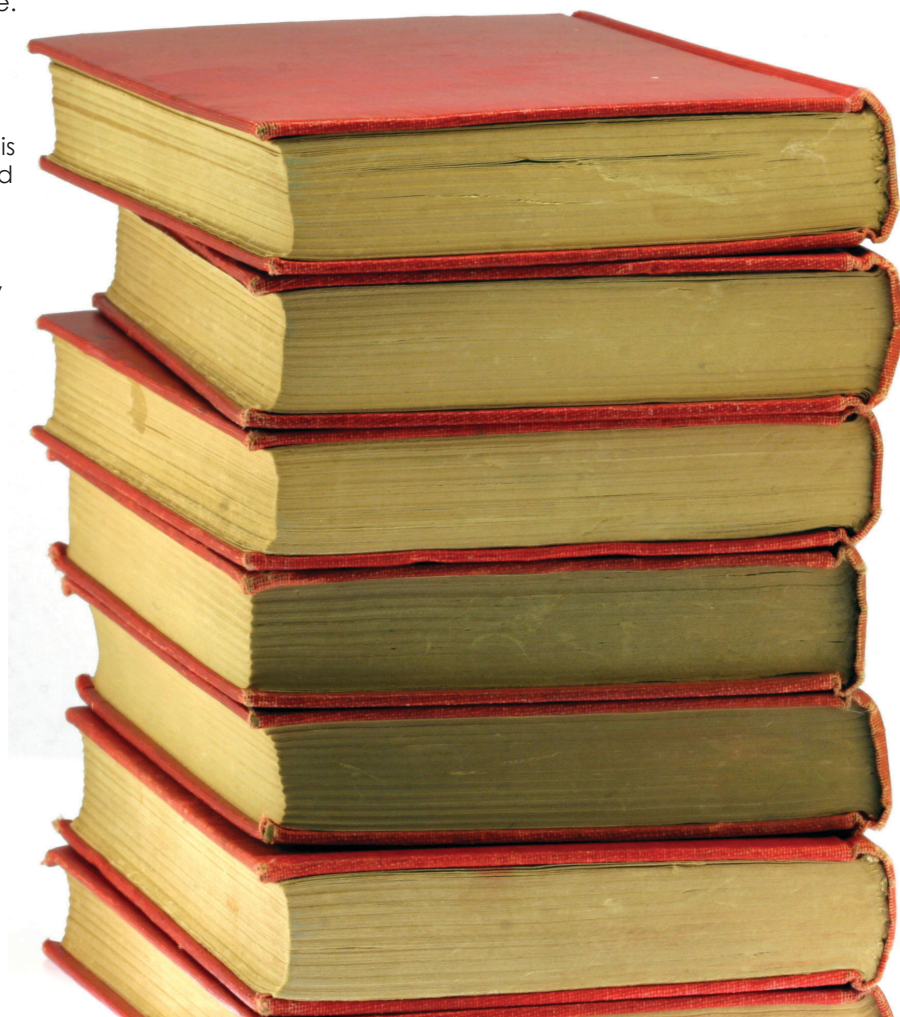
Introduction

This report examines the trends and characteristics in educational attainment in Northern Ontario. The first section of the paper covers formal education attainment and employment levels in Northern Ontario's census districts and compares them with the rest of the province and Canada. The second section covers secondary education in Northern Ontario, specifically focusing on graduation rates. The final section examines Aboriginal education in Ontario at large, an important facet of any meaningful discussion about education in Northern Ontario.

This paper observes that, with respect to levels of educational attainment in Northern Ontario, there is a gap between the region and the rest of the province in measures like formal education levels, graduation rates, and Aboriginal education. As the population of Northern Ontario declines, addressing some of the issues in the education system will be important if the region hopes to improve employment opportunities, maintain and improve youth retention numbers, and improve the health of Aboriginal communities.

Some of the key observations include:

- Formal education attainment levels in Northern Ontario are lower than the provincial average. Most notably, less people in the region have secondary and postsecondary education.
- The average graduation rate within English public secondary schools in Northern Ontario is well below the provincial average. English and French Catholic secondary schools are in line and often exceed the provincial average.
- Aboriginal education is still an area of primary concern for the province at large.



History

Like most governments, Ontario looks to the education system as a means of cultivating its citizens and providing them with the tools for a better life. This was first recognized in the 1840s, when Canada West¹ introduced the Common School Acts in 1841 as a way to centralize education and firmly place it in the government's hands. Throughout the nineteenth century, this new system was advanced by the government to the point where historian Peter Baskerville has suggested that by the later part of the century, "Ontario's children were more likely to attend school than were children in any other province" (Baskerville, 2010).

"In order to address the absence of a permanent education system, the Ontario government implemented an imaginative response in the 1920s by instituting "schools on wheels," railway car classrooms that served isolated communities in Northern Ontario."

Since Northern Ontario was settled and developed much later than the rest of the province, it remained out of the government's purview until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Demographics changed this situation as Northern Ontario's population exploded between 1891 and 1931, increasing from 55,000 to 360,000 (Kuhlberg, 2015). The boom forced the government to take greater stock of the region, but vast distances and sparse population densities complicated administration. Early on, Northern Ontario was synonymous with its wealth of natural resources and economic opportunities but this often stood in sharp contrast to the lack of social services, such as education.

Children from remote areas arriving by dogsled at school train operated by Ontario Department of Education



Source: Library and Archives Canada/National Film Board fonds/PA-142371

Aboriginal, Finnish, Norwegian, French and British children inside a school train at Nemigos, near Chapleau, Ontario, around 1950



Source: Library and Archives Canada/National Film Board of Canada/Photothèque collection/PA-111570
© Public Domain. Credit: H. Wright Corp.
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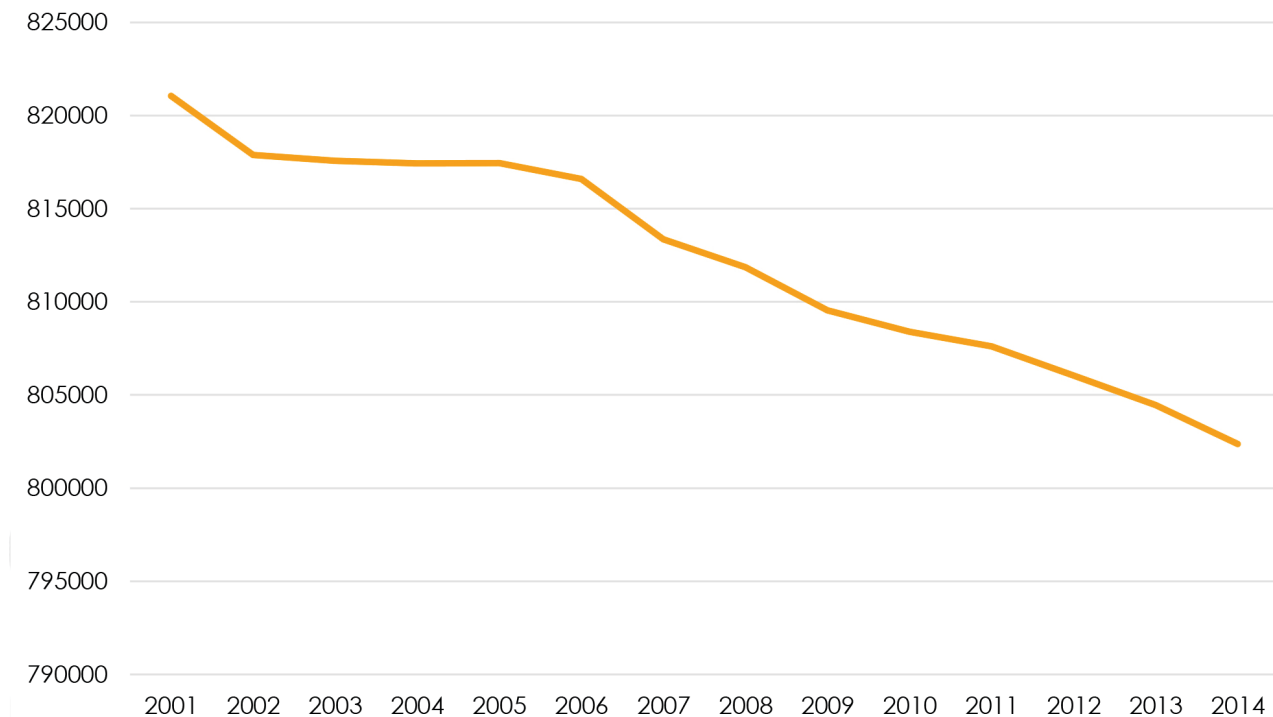
1 Ontario's precursor from 1841-1867

In order to address the absence of a permanent education system, the Ontario government implemented an imaginative response in the 1920s by instituting "schools on wheels," railway car classrooms that served isolated communities in Northern Ontario. Instituted by J.B. MacDougall, assistant chief inspector of schools, the first of these peripatetic schools opened in 1926, lasting for almost 40 years. At its pinnacle, there were seven schools on wheels, bringing education to some 226 children (Stamp, 1982). Historians have looked back on the mobile classrooms quite fondly, asserting that they "brought not only education but hope to the children and adults of our remote Northern areas, and, what was probably more important to them as individuals and new citizens of Canada, the realization that someone was deeply interested in their welfare" (Clewley and Kelly, 1975).

The provincial government's methods of disseminating education have certainly changed from the early twentieth century, but it remains a key area of concern in Northern Ontario. Innovative responses are needed as the region's population has declined over the last ten years (see Figure 1) and it is expected to drop further, bottoming out at 776,000 by 2036, representing a 3.5 percent decrease from 2013 (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

As the region's population continues to ebb, educational development is crucial. An aging population in Northern Ontario will limit the region's ability to compensate for outmigration through natural increases. As a result, Northern Ontario needs to find ways to ensure that youth are finding education and employment opportunities in the region.

Figure 1. Population of Northern Ontario, 2001-2014



Source: Statistics Canada, CAN SIM Table 051-0062. Calculated by combining the populations for each of the eleven census districts in northern Ontario from 2001 to 2014.

Educational Attainment in Northern Ontario

The 2011 National Household Survey from Statistics Canada shows that many census districts² in Northern Ontario have a higher percentage of people in the labour force with no certificate, diploma, or degree of any kind compared to Ontario and Canada at large. Many of these districts are also more likely to have a smaller percentage of people with a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree compared to the provincial and national averages.

For example, of the total number of people estimated to be in Ontario's labour force (active and non-active, all ages), 19 percent do not have a certificate, diploma, or degree, 26 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, and 55 percent have a

postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree.³ At the national level, these figures are quite comparable, sitting at 20, 26, and 54 percent respectively.

Conversely, of the 11 Northern Ontario districts, all of them had higher percentage of people with no certificate, diploma, or degree compared to the national and provincial average. For example, the Kenora District in northwestern Ontario had the highest level of individuals with no certificate, diploma or degree, at 31 percent. Other jurisdictions, including the Cochrane and Timiskaming Districts in the northeast, were similar with 30 percent (Figure 3). Per capita, this is considerably higher than the provincial average.

Figure 2. Northern Ontario by Economic Region and Census District.

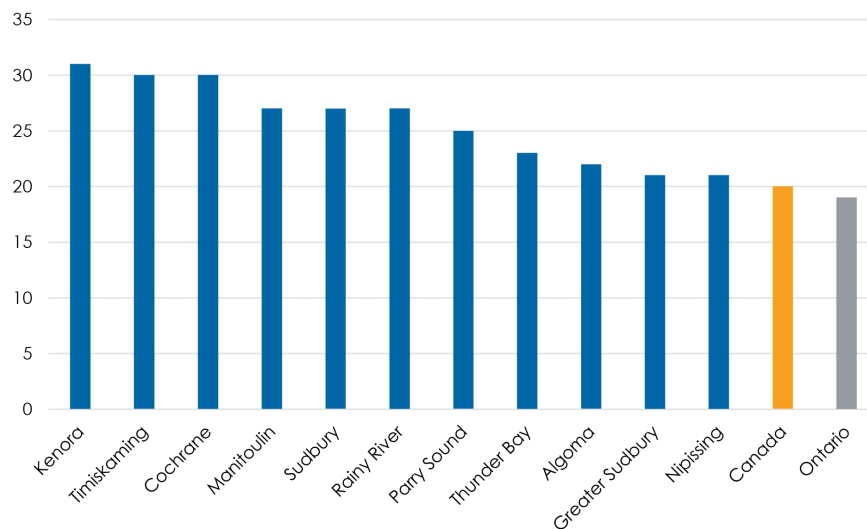


Source: Statistics Canada. Designed and produced by Northern Policy Institute, September 2014.

² Northern Ontario has eleven census districts: Timiskaming, Algoma, Cochrane, Greater Sudbury, Kenora, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Rainy River, Sudbury, and Thunder Bay.

³ From Statistics Canada: "‘Highest certificate, diploma or degree’ refers to the highest certificate, diploma or degree completed based on a hierarchy which is generally related to the amount of time spent ‘in-class.’ For postsecondary completers, a university education is considered to be a higher level of schooling than a college education, while a college education is considered to be a higher level of education than in the trades. Although some trades requirements may take as long or longer to complete than a given college or university program, the majority of time is spent in on-the-job paid training and less time is spent in the classroom."

Figure 3. Percentage of Total Labour Force in Northern Ontario Without Certificate, Diploma or Degree, 2011



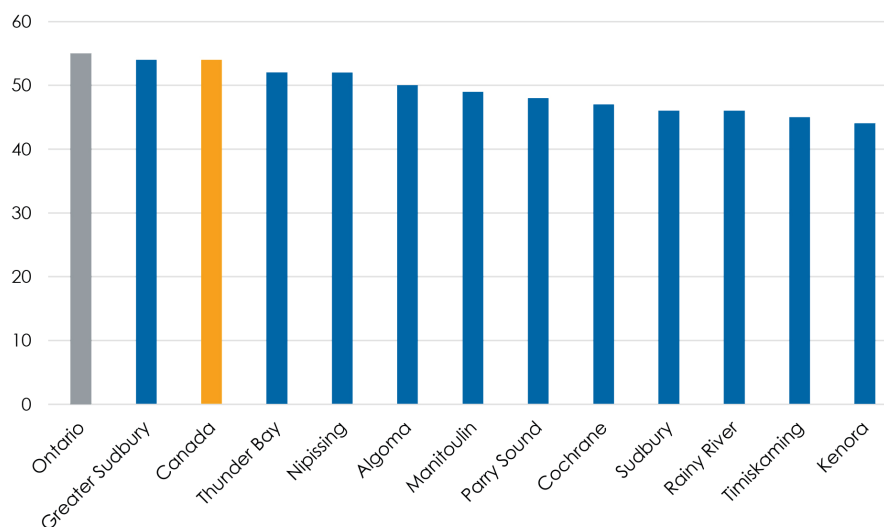
Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey Profile.

In terms of a high school diploma or equivalent, the 11 Northern Ontario districts are on par with the provincial and national average. In both Ontario and Canada, 26 percent of the total labour force has a high school diploma or equivalent. The average for all 11 districts in Northern Ontario is also 26 percent but is as low as 23 percent in the Cochrane District and as high as 28 percent in the Algoma District (National Household Survey, 2011).

While Northern Ontario is on par with its provincial and national counterparts for high school education levels within the labour force, it has fewer people, on

average, with a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree (Figure 4). In Ontario, it is estimated that 55 percent of the total labour force has completed a postsecondary program. For Canada, this figure is 54 percent. The average amongst all of the 11 Northern Ontario districts is 50 percent, which is not significantly lower but still noteworthy. While locales such as the Greater Sudbury and Thunder Bay Districts are nearly at the provincial average with 54 and 52 percent respectively, smaller and more remote districts such as Kenora and Timiskaming are significantly lower than the regional, provincial, and national averages, at 44 and 45 percent.

Figure 4. Percentage of Total Labour Force in Northern Ontario with Postsecondary Certificate, Diploma or Degree, 2011



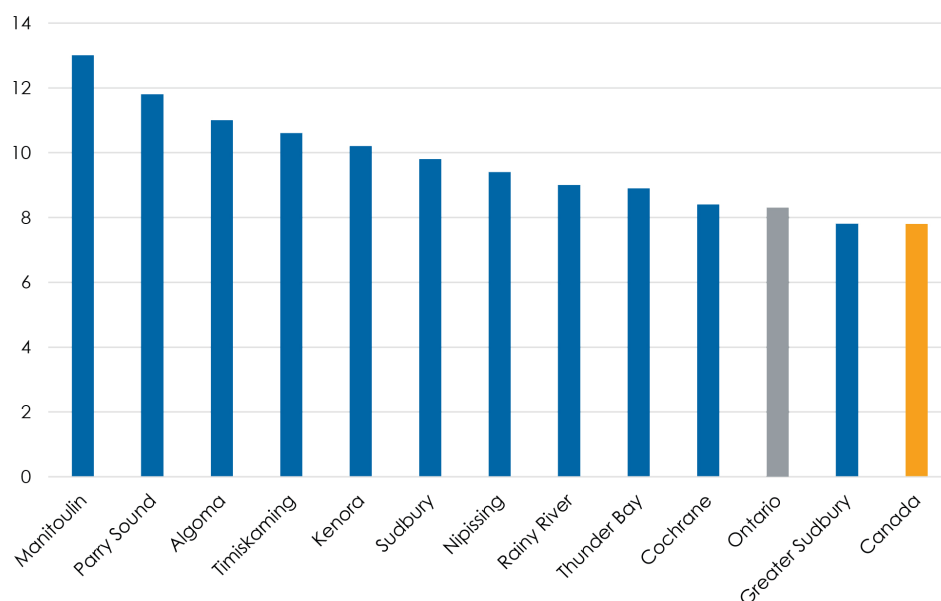
Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey Profile.

The numbers for some of these Northern districts is not surprising given the importance of the natural resources sector to the local economies. Industries such as mining and forestry, integral components of Northern Ontario's resource economy, often require less postsecondary education for certain positions and this, in turn, could lead to a lower rate of postsecondary education in some areas.

These numbers suggest that some of Northern Ontario's labour force possesses far less secondary and postsecondary education than their counterparts in other parts of the province. These findings were also reached by Chris Southcott in his 2008 study, "Trends in Northern Ontario's Education Levels." Similarly, his use

Based on Statistics Canada's most recent National Household Survey (2011), the unemployment rate (all-ages) for the total labour force in Ontario is 8.3 and 7.8 percent for Canada (Figure 5). Districts in Northern Ontario, such as Manitoulin and Parry Sound, have unemployment rates as high as 13 and 11.8 percent. Greater Sudbury has the lowest unemployment rate in the region at 7.8 percent but also has the highest level of postsecondary certificates, diplomas, or degrees at 54 percent. Districts with higher proportions of the labour force not holding certificates, diplomas, or degrees are also found to have higher unemployment rates on average. While these rates might be linked to education levels, they could also be a byproduct of the volatility of the natural resource economies

Figure 5. Total Labour Force Unemployment Rate (%) in Northern Ontario, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey Profile.

of 2006 Census data found that "educational levels in Northern Ontario continue to be lower than the averages for Ontario" (Southcott, 2008).

According to a forthcoming Northern Policy Institute research report by Dr. Bakhtiar Moazzami, estimations show that the percentage of new jobs requiring post-secondary education will increase significantly in the future. Using various studies by organizations that included the Ontario Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and other government agencies, Moazzami estimated that 70 percent of the new jobs in 2011 required post-secondary education and this threshold is expected to climb to 80 percent by 2031 (Moazzami, 2015).

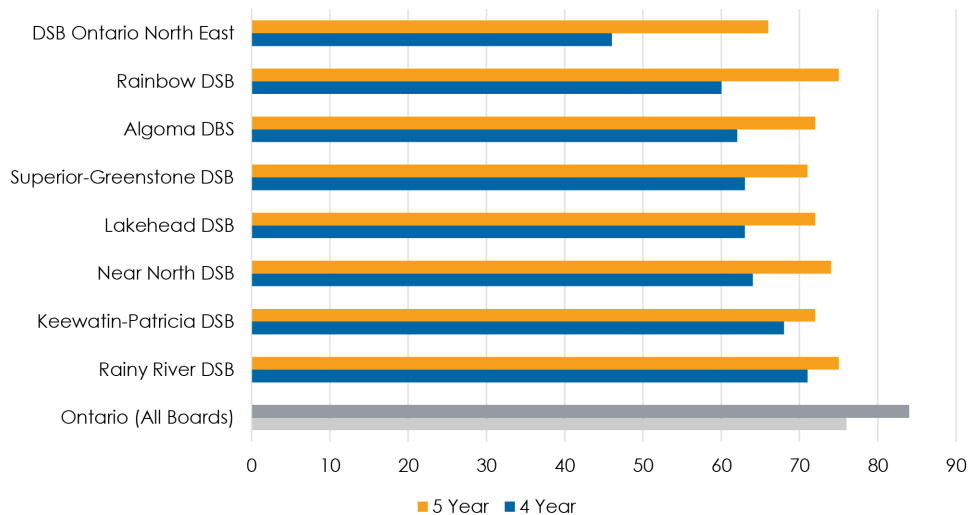
On one level, this suggests that Northern Ontario is less educated than the rest of the province, but it may also explain higher unemployment rates in Northern Ontario.

that dominate the region. Many occupations in the resource economy have seasonal variability, which could account for the higher than normal unemployment rates. Districts with above average unemployment rates such as Algoma, Cochrane, and Parry Sound are also the biggest contributors to Northeastern Ontario's youth out-migration levels (Cuddy, 2015). It is also worth noting that 39 percent of the Canadian population lives in Ontario and yet, nearly 42 percent of unemployed Canadians reside in the province (Mowat Centre, 2014). As a result, this is a significant issue, and it may be adversely contributing to youth outmigration and exacerbating retention levels. If Northern Ontario wants to mitigate these outmigration levels, it is imperative that it work towards providing youth with opportunities to find education and employment in the region in which they live.

How does Northern Ontario's secondary education stack up against the rest of the province and nation? According to Ontario's Ministry of Education, the province's high school graduation rate is higher than it has been in the last 10 years. The graduation rate for students completing high school within five years is 16 percentage points higher than it was in 2004, increasing

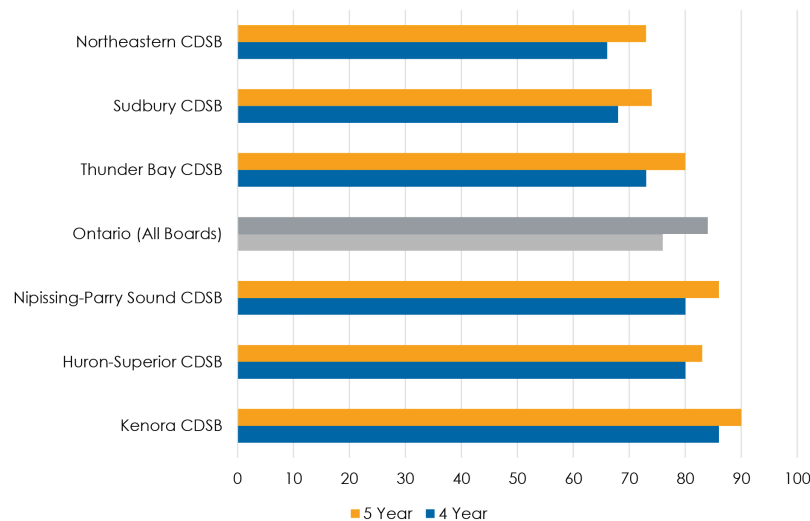
suggested that Ontario is "among the world's highest-performing school systems" and Ontario has one of the highest secondary school graduation rates in the world (Mourshed et al, 2010). Despite this optimism and high praise, the graduation rate among Northern Ontario's English public school boards remains well below the provincial average. Of the eight Northern

Figure 6. 2014 Northern Ontario English-Public School Board Average Graduation Rates vs Province



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015.

Figure 7. 2014 Northern Ontario English-Catholic School Board Graduation Rate vs Province



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015.

from 68 to 84 percent. A considerable increase was also observed among students graduating within four-years, climbing from 56 percent in 2004 to 76 percent in 2014, demonstrating that, "since 2004, approximately 163,000 more students have graduated than would have if the graduation rate had remained at the 2004 level" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). McKinsey and Company, a global management consulting firm based out of London, England, has also recently

Ontario English-public district school boards (Figure 6), the highest graduation rate amongst students within four years was 68 percent in the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board and within five years, 74 percent of students graduated in the Near North District School Board. The lowest graduation rates were both in the Ontario Northeast District School Board; 46 percent within four years and 66 percent within five years.

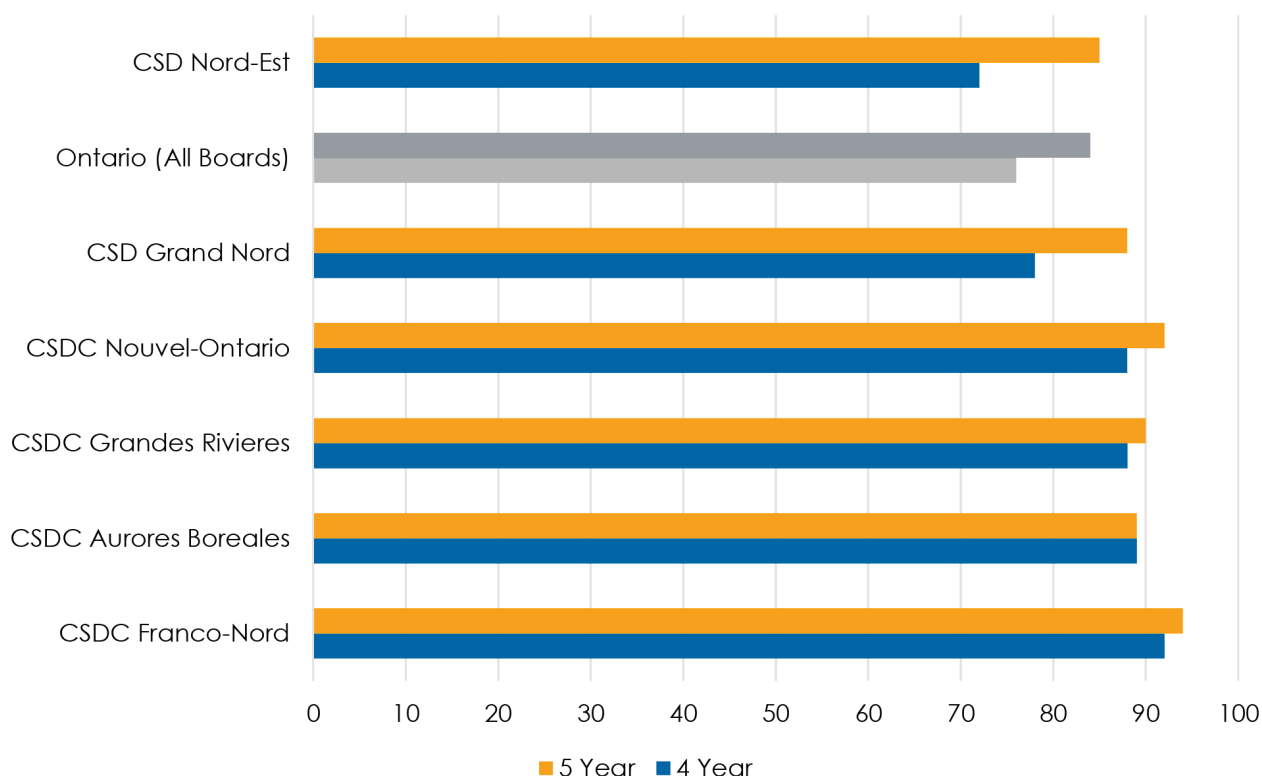
The graduation rates are far more positive for the North's Catholic school boards (both English and French). While only one English-Catholic school board surpassed the provincial average for graduation rates in four and five streams, the other three (Figure 7) were still considerably higher than the eight English-public school boards.

French-Catholic school boards in Northern Ontario fare much better than their English and public counterparts. The six French-language school boards highlighted in Figure 8 reveal significantly higher graduation rates compared to the provincial average for all school boards in Ontario. It is possible that higher outcomes in French-language secondary schools could be linked to smaller class sizes. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, during the 2013-14 school year there were 662,446 students enrolled in secondary schools across the province but French-language students only represented 4 percent of this total (Ministry of Education, 2014).

While secondary graduation rates amongst Northern Ontario's English and French Catholic School Boards are on par with and often exceed the provincial rates, English Public School Board secondary graduation rates


are significantly lower than the provincial average. The Rainbow District School Board (RDSB), the largest in the region and located in Sudbury, reveals why graduation rates are a challenge in the region. The Ministry's most recent findings reveal that only 6 out of 10 students will graduate from a Rainbow secondary school within four years and 8 out of 10 will graduate within five years from the beginning of enrollment. It is important to remember that the RDSB also includes places such as Manitoulin Island, Espanola, and Levack. As a result, some students in these outlying areas may have longer commutes to their respective schools. Could considerations such as these, inherently related to the administrative and geographic makeup of Northern Ontario, be complicating the situation? Should consideration also be given to the graduation requirement that students must complete a minimum of 40 hours of community service? Is it more challenging for students in rural areas to complete these requirements? Namely, do they have the same access as their urban counterparts to organizations to help them attain these hours of volunteer work? It appears that Northern Ontario's English Public School Boards need to do more in order to elevate graduation rates and help students achieve their full potential but could this just be the surface of a much larger issue?

Figure 8. 2014 Northern Ontario French-Catholic School Board Graduation Rates vs Province



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015.

Aboriginal Education



While the purview of Aboriginal education often falls within the jurisdiction of the federal government, it is estimated that there are approximately 78,000 Aboriginal students in Ontario, 82 percent of whom will attend publicly-funded schools in the province (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, Methot, 2013). Aboriginal peoples make up roughly 13 percent of Northern Ontario's population, therefore, Aboriginal education in the region remains an area of key focus for the Ministry of Education.⁴ By 2016 the Ministry hopes that its renewed focus on Aboriginal education, as part of the province's broader New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs, will net positive results in three critical areas, which are outlined in The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, released in 2007, as: improving achievement among First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students, closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a number of areas ranging from literacy and numeracy to the pursuit of postsecondary education, and ensuring all students have an understanding of Aboriginal cultures and perspectives (Ministry of Education, 2007). A progress report released in 2009 found that stronger relationships and capacity building have been forged between the province's school boards and Aboriginal organizations. (Ministry of Education, 2009). The second update noted that these partnerships were continuing to develop and that the Ministry had begun carrying out Aboriginal student self-identification data collection and analysis in order to establish a baseline measurement (Ministry of Education, 2013). The data collection process should have begun in earnest with the implementation of the Framework in 2007 in order to better assess the tangibility of the program. Nevertheless, bridging the socioeconomic gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population is a critical national project that begins with education and the Ministry is continuing this work at the community and board level.

Aboriginal post-secondary education is another important issue. According to the 2011 National Household Survey Aboriginal Population Profile, 31 percent of the Aboriginal population in Ontario (aged 15 years and over) have less than a high school diploma or equivalent. This represents a positive change from the estimated 42 percent in the 2001 census and while this significant improvement should be lauded, greater efforts also need to be taken at the post-secondary level. Post-secondary educational

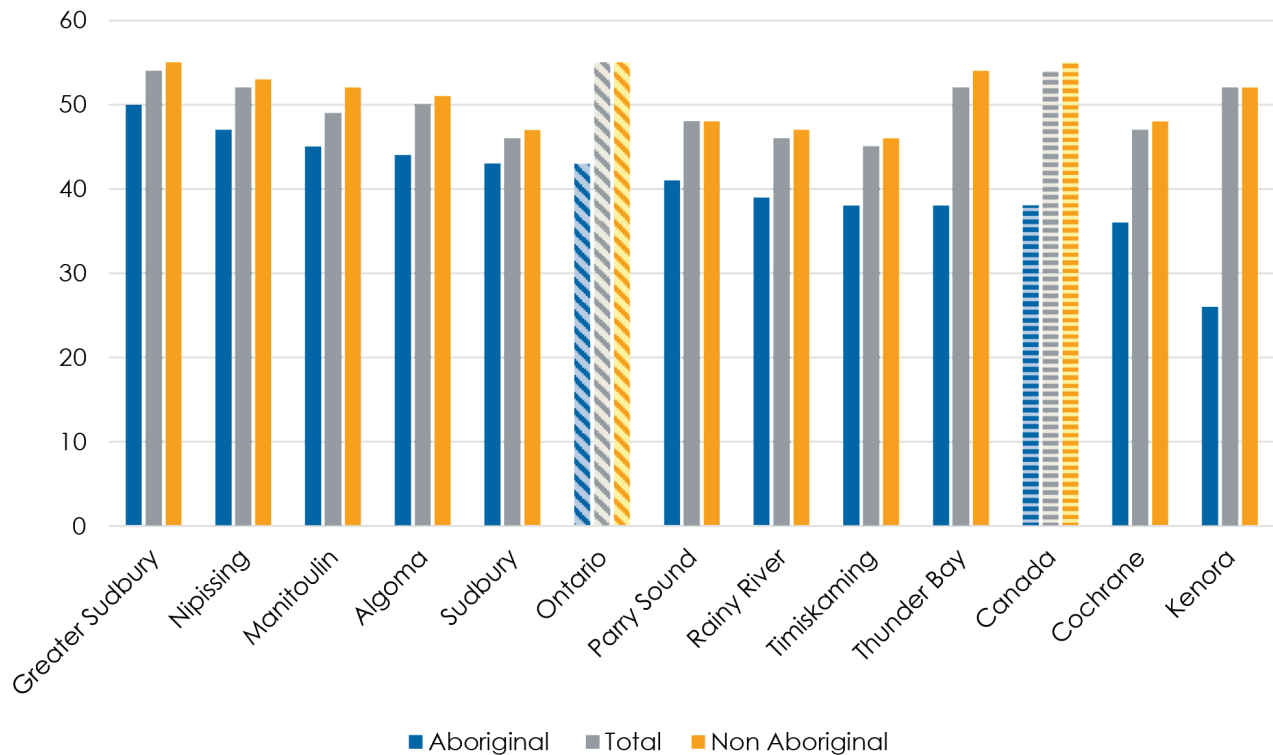
⁴ Aboriginal includes First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Population was calculated by comparing the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile with the general 2011 NHS Profile at the census division level. It should also be noted that the average Global Non-Response Rate for these districts is nearly 34% on average, a limitation that has been noted by critics of the National Household Survey. As a result, the Aboriginal population figures are conservative.

attainment levels for Aboriginal students remain below their non-Aboriginal counterparts but there are positive signs that the gap is closing. Aboriginal student's attainment levels in the Greater Sudbury and Nipissing census districts are very close to non-Aboriginal students and nearly half of the Northern Ontario districts are above the provincial average and nearly all are above the national average amongst Aboriginal students (Figure 9).⁵

The disparity in attainment is linked to broader issues in social and economic inequality, but proximity is also a factor. Researchers such as Angela Nardozi have noted that First Nations in general, and Anishinabek communities in particular, were more likely to choose postsecondary programs in areas nearest to the

community due to suspicion and isolation from the non-Aboriginal school system and the lingering effects of the residential schooling system, which has created intergenerational mistrust of the education system and continues to limit Aboriginal student participation (Nardozi, 2013). Nardozi also found that there was a clear desire amongst community members to pursue postsecondary education but the primary issue continues to be integrating Aboriginal students into the postsecondary education system and vice versa (Nardozi, 2013). With more and more jobs in Canada requiring some form of post-secondary education, it is imperative that Aboriginal students be able to access higher education, thereby closing the achievement gap while also improving their own labour market outcomes (Frenette, 2010).

Figure 9. Percentage of Population Aged 15 Years and Over with Postsecondary Certificate, Diploma or Degree, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey Profile and NHS Aboriginal Population Profile.

5 Non-Aboriginal population was calculated by comparing the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile with the general 2011 NHS Profile for each census district. It should also be noted that the average Global Non-Response Rate for these districts is nearly 34% on average, a limitation that has been noted by critics of the National Household Survey. As a result, the Aboriginal population figures are conservative.

Northern Ontario Education Comes Full Circle

Northern Ontario's travelling classrooms in the early twentieth century may have been a remnant of the province's early educational system but they could be making a comeback. Beginning in 2009, Cambrian College in Sudbury, unveiled a mobile training system for its skilled trades programs (Bulloch, 2009). Using tractor trailers, Cambrian College hopes that the mobile system will "eliminate gaps in skilled trades education – including pre-trades and apprenticeship training and customized corporate training – in remote areas and in Aboriginal communities adjacent to mining and industrial developments" (Cambrian College, 2009). Much like Ontario's locomotive classrooms of the early twentieth century, Cambrian

"The educational system in Northern Ontario is not producing the same results that are seen on average in Ontario and Canada [. . .] it is clear that there is still much work to be done to elevate the region."

College's Mobile Trades Training trailer will address some of the unique, logistical issues inherent to the region. Bringing postsecondary education and training to the province's northern and First Nations communities, could be one step in the wider effort towards increasing educational attainment, secondary graduation rates, and Aboriginal education in Northern Ontario.

The educational system in Northern Ontario is not producing the same results that are seen on average in Ontario and Canada. By examining the education levels within the region's labour force, secondary school graduation rates, and Aboriginal education, it is clear that there is still much work to be done to elevate the region. At the heart of the conundrum is the issue of accessibility. It is no coincidence that areas in the North, such as Greater Sudbury and Thunder Bay, that have the highest rates of postsecondary education

also have the lowest rates of unemployment. Why? Both have excellent postsecondary opportunities for local students. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities located further north have limited opportunities for postsecondary education and any viable options can only be achieved by considerable relocation. Marc Frenette has found that students living "out-of-commuting distance" are far less likely to attend postsecondary schooling than students living "within commuting distance." Students beyond 40km from a university (35 percent of the student population) are only 63 percent as likely to attend university shortly after high school as students living within 40km from a university. Students living beyond 80km from a university are only 58 percent as likely to attend as students living within 40km. As a result, distance to school can certainly act as a deterrent, largely because of the relocation costs, an issue that can have a greater impact on students coming from lower-income families (Frenette, 2004). The introduction of Cambrian College's Mobile Trades Training program may help to address issues of accessibility and hopefully the scale and scope of these operations will increase as other postsecondary institutions take notice. However, while these mobile training facilities are certainly innovative they are also not long-term solutions.

One of the most pressing issues in Northern Ontario remains that of infrastructure. Bringing higher education to northern communities through brick and mortar is one possibility but increasing accessibility to postsecondary opportunities throughout the region will require continued focus on infrastructure investment and development. Aside from taking an "if you build it, they will come" approach, there still needs to be an emphasis on investing into current infrastructure, particularly connectivity in more northern areas. Improving digital and communications infrastructure will not only facilitate economic development but, at an educational level, it will improve the learning environments for students and teachers and provide them with the tools to teach for the future.

While levels of educational attainment may lag behind the rest of the province, there is optimism on the horizon. Doing what is best for the children in the North requires continued efforts to provide them with the best possible education. This includes attracting great teachers, as Northern Ontario can be a great place to learn, and a great place to teach. Making improvements to education is complicated and tabling solutions requires innovative thinking.

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Who We Are

Internally, Northern Policy Institute seeks to be as “lean” as possible with much of the work contracted out to experts in the fields under consideration. This approach avoids the risks associated with large bureaucratic organizations. It also allows Northern Policy Institute to flexibly respond across a wide range of issues while also building up in house and regional expertise by matching bright young minds on temporary placements and project specific work with talented experts who can supply guidance and coaching.

Some of the key players in this model, and their roles, are as follows:

Board: The Board of Directors sets strategic direction for Northern Policy Institute. Directors serve on operational committees dealing with finance, fundraising and governance, and collectively the Board holds the CEO accountable for achieving our Strategic Plan goals. The Board's principal responsibility is to protect and promote the interests, reputation, and stature of Northern Policy Institute.

President & CEO: Recommends strategic direction, develops plans and processes, and secures and allocates resources to achieve it.

Advisory Council: A group of committed individuals interested in supporting, but not directing, the work of Northern Policy Institute. Leaders in their fields, they provide advice on potential researchers or points of contact in the wider community.

Research Advisory Board: A group of academic researchers who provide guidance and input on potential research directions, potential authors, and draft studies and commentaries. They are Northern Policy Institute's formal link to the academic community.

Peer Reviewers: Ensure specific papers are factual, relevant and publishable.

Authors and Research Fellows: Provide independent expertise on specific policy areas as and when needed.

Standing engagement tools (general public, government stakeholders, community stakeholders): Ensure Northern Policy Institute remains responsive to the community and reflects THEIR priorities and concerns in project selection.

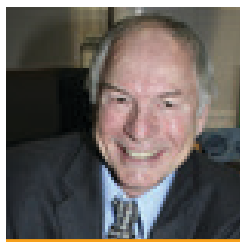
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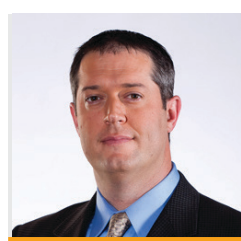
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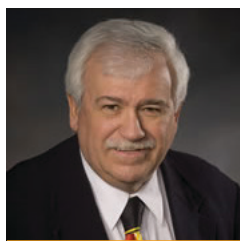
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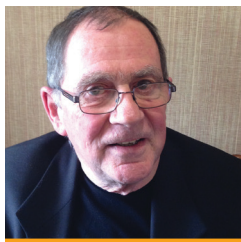
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