

RECOGNITION & RESPECT



Aboriginal Education Assistants & Unpaid Work

A report based CUPE BC Region's
Respect & Recognition survey

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Executive Summary

Aboriginal education assistants have used their participation in the CUPE's *Respect & Recognition* survey to voice concerns similar to those affecting their non-Aboriginal counterparts – unpaid work, lack of scheduled work hours, lack of opportunity to plan, prepare or consult, and inadequate training support for the work they do. At the same time, there are areas where their survey responses underline the unique quality of the work Aboriginal EAs perform. The following points summarize the central finding of this research report into Aboriginal EA work.

- Aboriginal EAs are younger and have less on-the-job experience with their school district employers than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.
- More Aboriginal EAs involved in the survey live and work in the northern and Vancouver Island regions in areas where there are higher percentage concentrations of aboriginal people and students. Less than 20 per cent were from Metropolitan Vancouver.
- Aboriginal EAs are also much more likely to work in alternate and non-standard school programs than their non-aboriginal counterparts. Despite the fact that most Aboriginal EAs report working in the special education field, a higher percentage are also found in programs and services geared to supporting Aboriginal students.
- Aboriginal EAs were less likely to have involvement in the development of Individual Education Programs, a finding that likely reflects either a lower incidence of IEPs amongst Aboriginal students, or insufficient acknowledgement of what Aboriginal EA might be able to contribute were they to have such involvement.
- Almost a third of Aboriginal EAs report travel time related to work, a rate close to three times the overall survey average. And, more than 40 per cent of Aboriginal EAs who travel report not being compensated for this time. At minimum this reflects significant inconsistency and disparity within and amongst school districts.
- The incidence of unpaid work for Aboriginal EAs is similar to that of the larger survey population with an average of just over two hours per week. Aboriginal EAs, like the larger survey population, also report working unpaid hours at multiple points before, during and after the paid work day and say they use this time to prepare for their assignments, to do necessary consultation or to provide student coverage in a host of circumstances.
- Aboriginal EAs report the same kinds of informal reporting and information-tracking systems as described in the 2008 *Recognition & Respect* report. Typically school-based administrators are cited either as participants in these arrangements or at least as having knowledge of them.
- Aboriginal EAs report levels and areas of education background and qualification that are generally similar to the larger survey population. They also report interest in further training that relate specifically to their work with Aboriginal students.
- When talking about their work, Aboriginal EAs draw attention to significant differences in the way their employment realities differ from those of non-aboriginal background. Aboriginal EAs work is seen as engaged more closely with Aboriginal families, communities and community-level agencies and services than is the norm elsewhere.

Aboriginal Education Assistants & Unpaid Work

- Aboriginal EAs report devoting substantial time and energy to making the public school system accessible to the parents and family members of their students, many of whom for various reasons feel alienated from the system.
- Aboriginal EAs feel broadly that their employment status and sometimes level of pay does not adequately reflect or acknowledge the distinctive qualities of the work they perform.

It is important for both employers and support staff unions like CUPE to work to address the distinctive reality of Aboriginal EA work in ways which acknowledge the valuable contribution these EAs make to our public K-12 system as well as to the lives of Aboriginal students in their care, their families and their communities. As part of this work, CUPE has consistently supported applications by employer school boards before the BC Human Rights Tribunal for permission to post education assistant positions requiring an incumbent of Aboriginal ancestry. In so doing, CUPE has recognized the need to be culturally sensitive as well as the importance of the role-modeling supported by these practices.

A. Introduction

In November 2008, CUPE's BC Regional Office released the main report of an education assistants survey on unpaid work, titled *Recognition & Respect: Addressing the unpaid work of education assistants in B.C.* Since that time, the union has published an additional report looking at an educational profile of EAs in the province. This latter report included an agenda for educational upgrading, elements of which have subsequently taken shape in the *Education and Skill Development for EAs* initiative now being implemented by the Support Staff Education and Adjustment Committee (SSEAC) of which CUPE and the BC Public School Employers' Association are the main participants.

This report is the third to be prepared using the 2008 survey data. It looks at a range of survey themes relating to the work life, practice and culture of education assistants of Aboriginal background. It also looks at education assistants who report working with Aboriginal students. Its purpose is to examine how issues raised in the larger survey report and in particular the issue of voluntary unpaid work impact Aboriginal EAs. It is also to examine how and where survey results may, for these workers, differ from those of the overall survey group or reflect work practices and characteristics unique to this sub-group of EAs. All of these areas are of relevance to efforts made by CUPE to better serve the needs of its Aboriginal members in the public school system.

To assist with the task of analyzing survey results, a focus group of Aboriginal educational support staff working in the K-12 school system was convened at the CUPE BC Division Convention in April, 2011. By examining and discussing preliminary survey results, this group was able to offer valuable insight into both the worklife of Aboriginal EAs as well as how the needs of Aboriginal students, parents, families and communities continue to have a direct impact on the performance of Aboriginal EA work.

When the unpaid work survey was launched in 2008, it targeted support staff working in BC's public school system providing educational services in direct contact with students. This approach helped evolve a broad and expansive definition of who was to be included under the term "education assistant," i.e. those providing direct educational services and supports to students. Wanting a large cross section of involvement from those meeting this definition, the survey invited participation from a wide range of school support positions, not all of which carried formal job titles reflecting the term "education assistant" or "teaching assistant." This included categories such as childcare workers, child and youth workers, cultural support workers, inner-city workers or settlement workers. As a result many support staff of First Nations background and/or working with First Nations students took part in the

survey, even though they may not have had a formal “education assistant” or “teacher assistant” job designation.¹

Consequently, what for the purposes of this report are termed Aboriginal education assistants (Aboriginal EAs) includes any of the following designated job titles: Aboriginal support worker, Aboriginal liaison worker, Aboriginal student worker, Aboriginal youth worker, First Nations support worker, First Nations education worker, Aboriginal resource aide, and more. These positions are, of course, in addition to any others with the words education or teaching assistant in the job title.

B. Aboriginal education and EAs in BC

The BC Ministry of Education provides districts with targeted funding to support Aboriginal education in BC, under the authority of Section 106 of the School Act. This funding is directed at students identified to be of Aboriginal ancestry. In 2010/11 there were 61,559 students within this category attending BC public schools, almost eleven per cent of total headcount enrolment. In total, the provincial government provided \$63 million in funding that year to support Aboriginal education programs across the province’s 60 school districts through a supplementary allocation of \$1,160 per student of Aboriginal ancestry over and above basic funding support available to all school-aged students.

BC has also, in recent years, moved forward with implementation of a formal education agreement signed by the provincial government, First Nations leaders and education authorities in 2006. This agreement helped lay a foundation for the assertion of First Nations jurisdiction over K-12 education and provided a funding arrangement to support further development of educational, cultural and language programs for Aboriginal learners. Central to the implementation of these objectives has been the negotiation of “enhancement agreements” that build collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal communities and school districts. These agreements typically underline the importance of Aboriginal language and culture programs to student participation and success in public schools. As of early 2011, such agreements were in place in 51 of BC’s 60 districts with more in a stage of active development.

Just as the elaboration of policies favouring inclusion of special needs students has fueled overall growth of education assistant roles within the public school system, the ongoing expansion of both Aboriginal

¹ This approach is also consistent with that used by CUPE Nationals Collective Agreement Information System (CAIS) which groups specific job titles into distinct classes. The largest of these classes within the K-12 sector – “Elementary and Secondary Teacher Assistants” – has within it a total of 13 Aboriginal-specific job titles found across a range of BC school districts.

educational programming as well as First Nations' involvement in these programs has brought a proliferation of EA-type job classifications across school districts where workers deliver concrete educational support to students of Aboriginal background. Workers within these classifications have, as a result, joined CUPE support staff bargaining units across the province. Many took part in CUPE's *Recognition & Respect* survey of unpaid education assistant work, undertaken in 2008. For its part CUPE has been broadly supportive of the expansion of Aboriginal programming throughout the K-12 system. The Union has also never opposed the use of preferential criteria for the hiring and promotion of support staff of Aboriginal background in situations where such criteria are essential to the successful operation of these programs.

C. Aboriginal EAs and the survey: demographic profile

The *Respect & Recognition* survey had 3,910 completed surveys representing about 40 per cent of all education assistants working in BC public schools. Within the online survey form, Question A6 asked EAs the following:

Are you of First Nations background? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

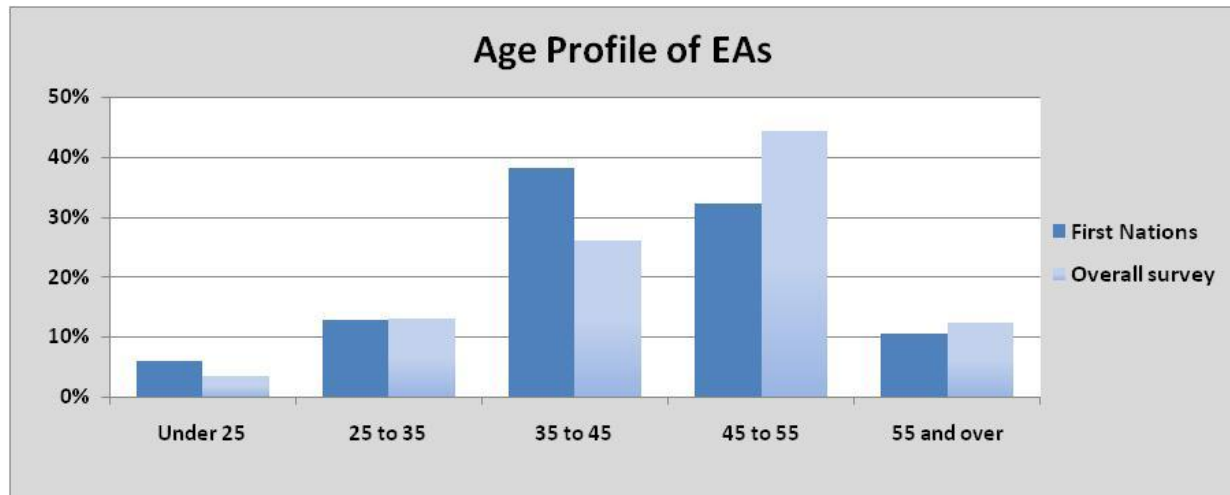
A total of 227 respondents – 6.2 per cent of the total survey population – indicated themselves to be of First Nations background. Question A7 requested that education assistants provide their formal job title and, of the responses provided, a total of 147 survey respondents gave responses clearly indicating that they worked in a First Nations capacity, providing educational services to students of First Nations background. Responses to this question were less exact in the sense that a job title may not give clear indication as to the nature of the job performed by the support worker in question or whether the job focused on the provision of services to Aboriginal students.

However, analyzing overlap between the two data sets shows that, of the 147 clear Aboriginal job titles, 120 or almost 82 per cent of incumbents also indicated themselves to be of aboriginal background. What this indicates is the evident reality that a large majority of people employed in positions delivering educational services to Aboriginal students are themselves of Aboriginal background.

1. Age

The following chart looks at an age breakdown of Aboriginal EAs participating in the survey, and compares this breakdown to the age profile for all EAs involved in the survey. As is evident, there are differences in the age profile of the larger group compared with the Aboriginal sub-set.

Chart 1: Age profile of EAs



The chart shows age breakdown not only for Aboriginal education assistants but also for the overall survey population. What is immediately apparent from this comparison is the increased prevalence of Aboriginal EAs within the “age 35 to 45” group – close to 40 per cent for the Aboriginal sub-group as compared with about 26 per cent for the overall EA population. At the same time, there is a significantly reduced proportion of Aboriginal EAs in the “above aged 45” groups – 43 per cent in the case of First Nations education assistants versus approximately 57 per cent for the overall survey population. The combined impact of these two facts has Aboriginal education assistants on average younger than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Indeed, the average age for Aboriginal survey participants is 43.7 years compared with 45.9 years for the survey population as a whole.

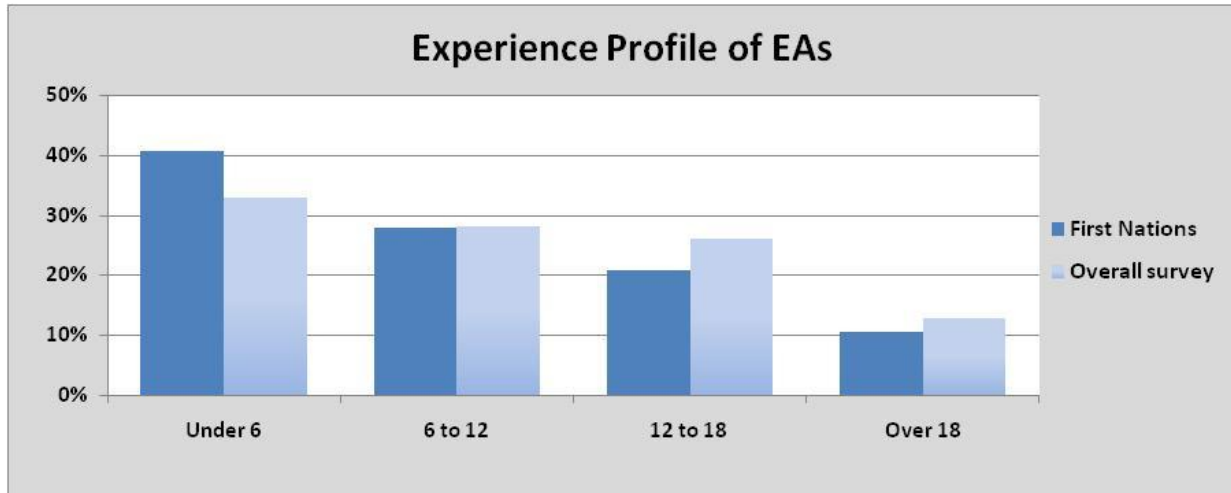
2. Gender

The 2008 *Recognition & Respect* report found the overall occupational classification of education assistants to be highly female-dominated with almost 94 per cent of survey respondents indicating themselves to be female. Gender breakdowns of Aboriginal EAs differ very little from the overall pattern where 90.3 per cent of respondents indicated they were female, 9.3 per cent indicated being male and .4 per cent selected the transgendered option. Clearly, the world of Aboriginal EA work is almost as female-dominated as is the case with the overall EA population.

3. Years of experience

The following chart shows the Aboriginal EA experience profile. It also provides a comparison of reported levels of experience with that of the overall survey group.

Chart 2: Experience profile of EAs

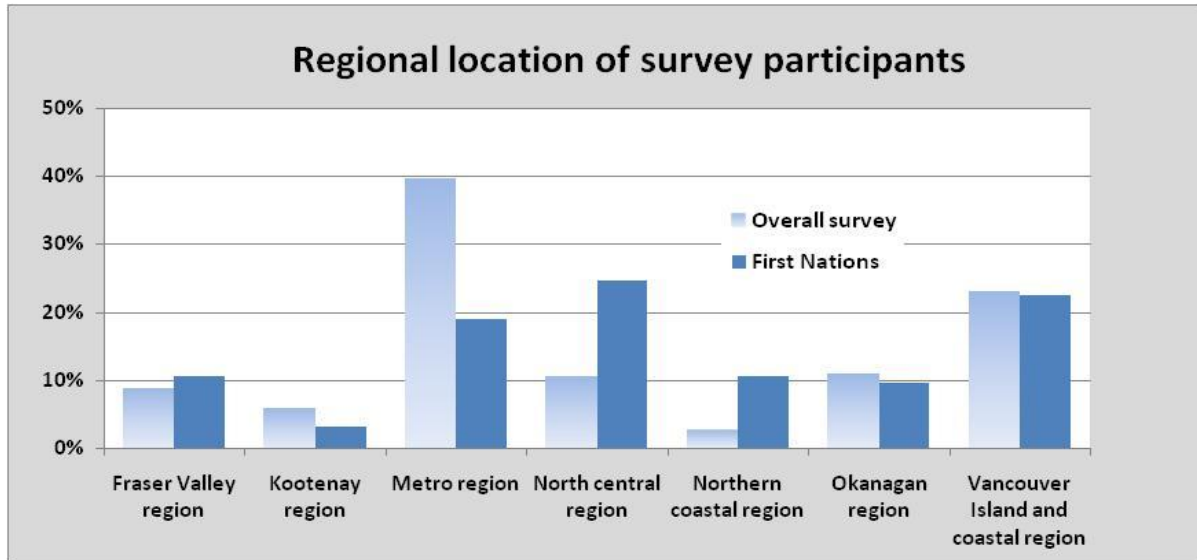


A largest block of Aboriginal EAs report total work experience of less than six years – 40.7 per cent of Aboriginal EAs compared with 33.0 per cent for the overall EA population. While the percentage found in the “6 to 12 year” group was equivalent, Aboriginal EAs were less prevalent amongst EAs with more than 12 years of experience. Average years of work experience for Aboriginal EAs came to 9.3 years. This compares with 10.5 years for the overall EA population. Overall then, Aboriginal EAs have less work experience than is the case with the larger EA population.

4. Geographic location of survey responses

The following chart shows the geographic distribution of survey responses.

Chart 3: Geographic location of survey participants



Information in the table shows Aboriginal EAs to be more heavily concentrated in North Central and North Coastal regions of the province. These regions together account for more than 35 per cent of Aboriginal EAs participating in the survey. Conversely, the overall survey population is more likely to be located in the Metropolitan Vancouver area – almost 40 per cent of all survey respondents. For Aboriginal EAs, less than half that amount is from the Metro region.

The explanation for this lies in the fact that the distribution of participating Aboriginal EAs closely matches the overall distribution of the BC’s Aboriginal population – by school district and aggregated into larger regional entities. Not surprisingly, Aboriginal EAs tend to work in regions throughout the province where concentrations of Aboriginal people are highest.

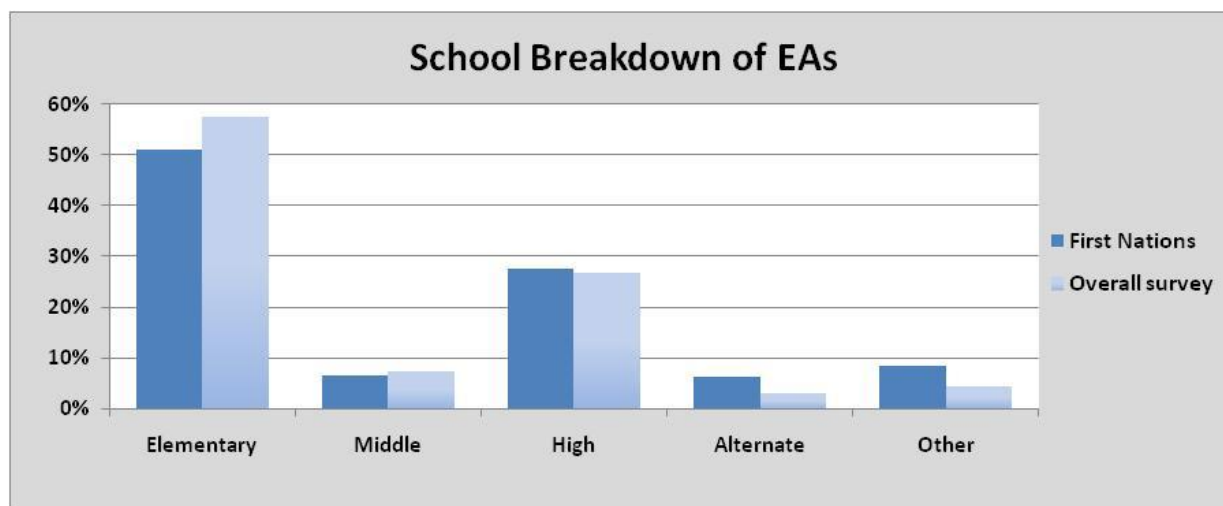
Chart 4: Comparison of survey participants and aboriginal population distribution²

Region	Aboriginal EAs (% total)	Aboriginal population (% total)	Variance of EA % from population %
Fraser Valley region	10.6%	9.2%	1.4%
Kootenay region	3.1%	3.7%	-0.6%
Metro region	18.9%	18.9%	0.0%
North central BC	24.7%	21.0%	3.7%
Northern coastal region	10.6%	12.0%	-1.5%
Okanagan region	9.7%	11.9%	-2.2%
Vancouver Island & coastal region	22.5%	23.3%	-0.8%

5. School breakdowns

The following breakdown shows survey responses by school level.

Chart 5: School breakdown of survey participants



Slightly over half of First Nations survey respondents work at elementary schools. A little over a quarter of respondents work at the high school level and the remaining close to 20 per cent work in other school

² Aboriginal population data comes from BC Stats socio-economic profile data, by school districts for 2006. (Available at www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/sep/sd/sd_main.asp).

and program arrangements. This breakdown differs somewhat from the overall survey population. Fewer Aboriginal EAs report working in elementary schools while more say they work in programs identified as “Alternate” or “Other.” What this likely reflects is a higher concentration of Aboriginal EAs assigned to work in programs established specifically to enroll Aboriginal students.

6. Work assignment breakdowns

As the following table indicates, working with multiple special education students is the most common work arrangement facing Aboriginal education assistants in BC.

Chart 6: Aboriginal EA work assignment

Focus of EA work assignment	Total	% Total
Multiple special education students	62	27.3%
Predominantly special education students	46	20.3%
Predominantly non- special education students	42	18.5%
One special education student	14	6.2%
Other	63	27.8%
N = 227		

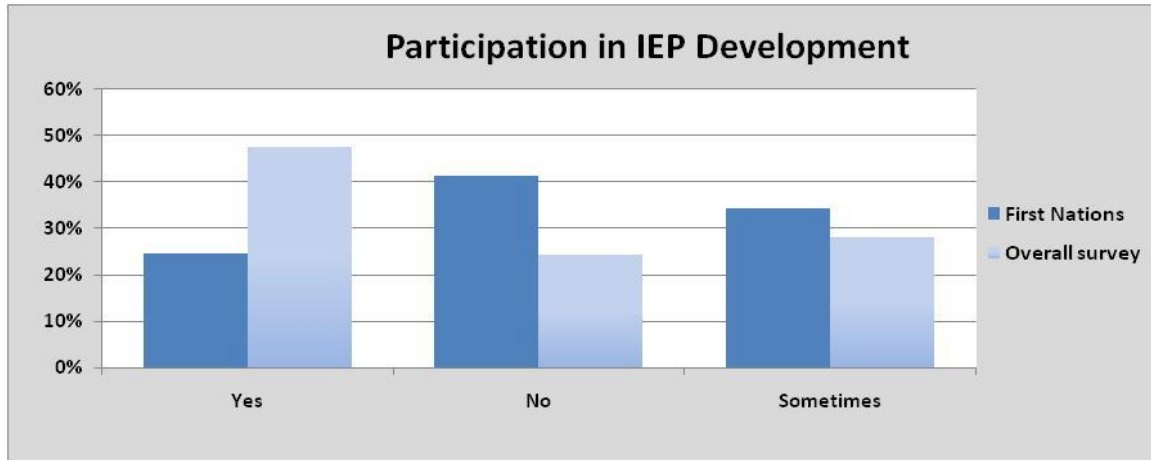
Working with special needs students is the norm, but... many Aboriginal EAs work with Aboriginal students in culturally-specific programs

Sizable blocks of education assistants do report working with non-special education students and in “Other” arrangements. Together these categories account for about 46 per cent of Aboriginal survey participants. While the survey information cannot specify with any certainty what these arrangements might be, it is certain that many Aboriginal EAs work in aboriginal student programs that cater to the specific cultural and social needs of different aboriginal groupings within the student population as a whole. In conjunction with the previous measure, it appears many of these programs are housed in regular elementary, middle or secondary school facilities.

At the same time, significantly fewer Aboriginal EAs reported being involved with students having Individual Education Programs (IEPs) than is the norm for the larger EA population. Within BC’s public school system, designated special education students typically have IEPs that specify learning goals, approaches and anticipated outcomes with such plans adapted to the learning challenges of individual students. Only 30 per cent of Aboriginal EAs said their students had IEPs compared with more than 63 per cent of all survey-participating EAs. Again, this measure may reflect the assignment of EAs to aboriginal cultural or language programs which do not use IEPs with students.

For those that did work with IEPs, Aboriginal EAs also reported varying degrees of involvement in their development.

Chart 7: Participation in IEP Development



Significantly fewer Aboriginal EAs report involvement in IEP development than is the case for the larger EA population. A result such as this may suggest there are less-prescriptive norms regarding EA involvement in this type of work within the Aboriginal programs. Alternately, it may reflect a situation where the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal EAs is, for whatever reason, undervalued within the IEP development process and input into IEPs is not sought.

Aboriginal EAs participating in a focus group discussing the nature of their work had much to say about IEPs, their work and their students. As is evident, some Aboriginal EAs devote energy to challenging IEPs in the interest of not having impediments placed in the paths of the Aboriginal students they work with.

Chart 8: Focus group comments from Aboriginal EAs on IEPs

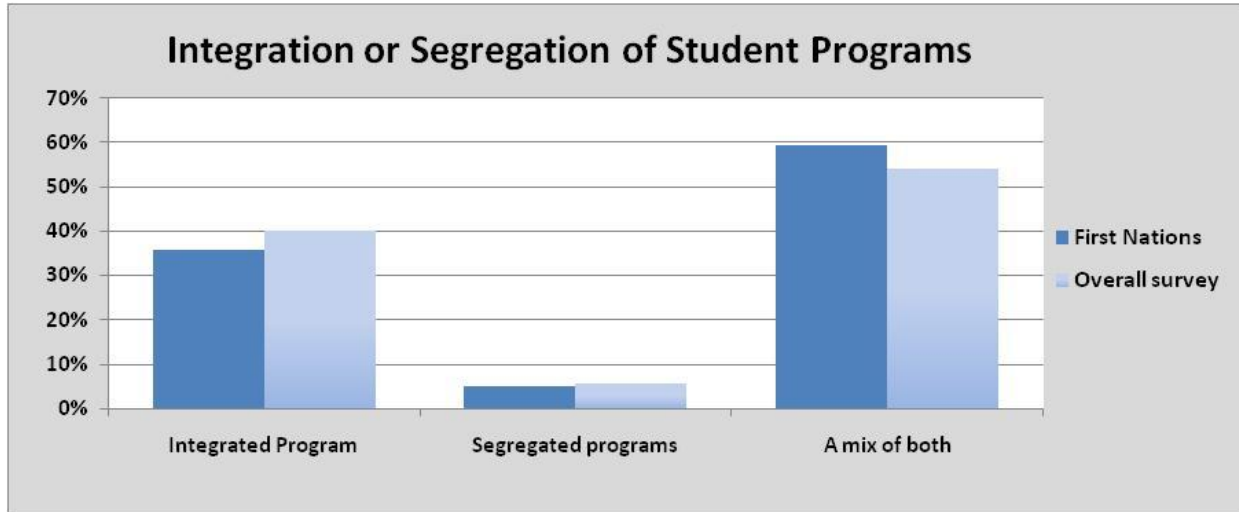
We have a lot of IEPs and they are all done by the learning systems teacher. My job is to work with the parents, to prepare the parents for being involved in this process and to support them.
I had no involvement with IEP's. We had lots of IEPs before. There were lots of students who were given a behavioral label and unfortunately this stayed with them through their entire time in school. This was not good.
I spent a lot of time fighting IEP's. I know my students. And I know my families intimately. My job is to make sure they are treated fairly and their needs are met in this process.
I spend time fighting to prevent modifications to student programs and to ensure that these programs are adapted so that students can still have the opportunity to graduate from school.

Comments like these point to problems in the relationship linking Aboriginal students to BC's system of special education. They also underline the impact these problems have on Aboriginal EAs who often face a resulting need to lobby and advocate on their students' behalf.

7. Program integration

The survey also asked EAs whether they worked with students in programs that were integrated, segregated or a mixture of both. The following table shows the pattern of responses.

Chart 9: Integration or segregation of student programs



The data show that, as with the larger survey, programs that mix student integration and segregation are the norm for Aboriginal EAs. In the main *Recognition & Respect* report, the following observation was made in relation to this situation,

... the majority of education assistants working in the province's public schools have work assignments where they attend to children who are integrated into regular classrooms for part of the school day but who are also pulled out of classrooms for other parts of the day. Alternately, (many) education assistants work with some students in integrated programs and other students in programs that are not integrated." (p. 14)

Indeed, work in programs that mix both approaches are about five per cent more predominant for Aboriginal EAs than is the case with the larger survey. With these comparisons, it should be remembered that Aboriginal programs are not subject to the same policy direction as applies in the special education field. For this reason, Aboriginal programs have greater flexibility opting for service models without having to contend with policy directions promoting maximum integration of students in regular classroom settings.

8. Employment status

The following table compares reported employment status for the Aboriginal EA sub-group and the overall survey population

Chart 10: Employment status of EAs

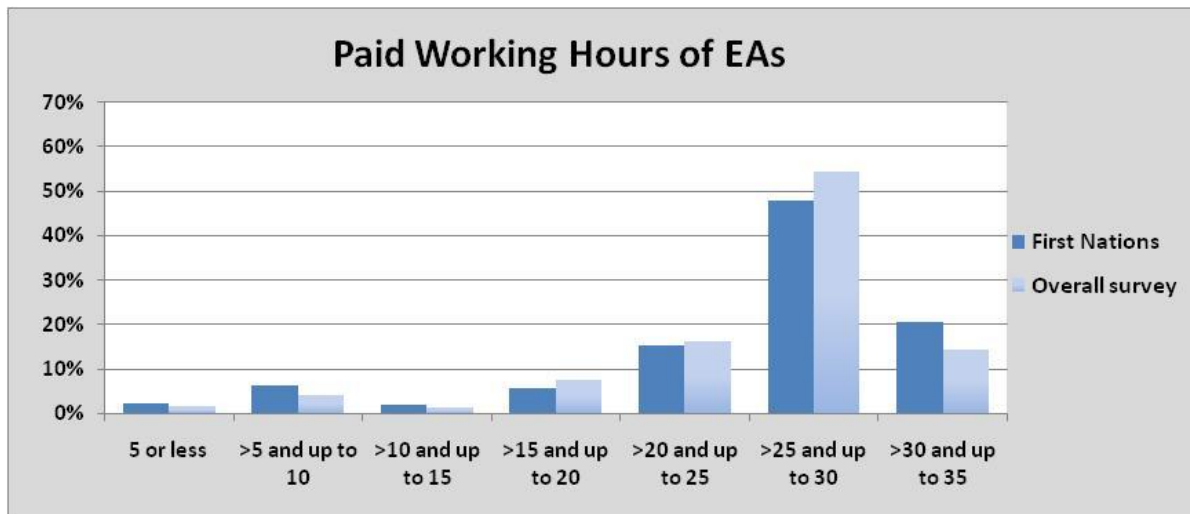
Job status	Aboriginal EAs	Overall survey	% Variance
Continuing	80.6%	80.1%	+0.5%
Term	19.4%	19.8%	-0.4%
N = 227			

As can be seen, these figures are highly similar to those found with the overall education assistant population. Most EAs report working in a continuing employment relationship with their school district employers, while a smaller group – approximately one in five EAs – indicates working in a “term employment” capacity.³

D. Paid Assignments Aboriginal EAs

Within the overall survey, education assistants were asked to record their normal paid weekly assignment of hours. The following chart shows the breakdown.

Chart 11: Paid working hours of EAs



³ As was the case with the *Recognition & Respect* report, casual EAs are not included in these calculations because of the unique quality and character of their employment relationship with school district employers. There were 15 survey respondents who indicated themselves to be of First Nations background and working in a casual employment capacity.

As with the overall survey group, Aboriginal EAs report a norm of part-time employment. While a smaller group reported paid hours in the “25-30” weekly range, a larger percentage did say it worked over 30 hours per week. The most common reported assignments were those of 25 hours (26 surveys), 27.5 hours (32 surveys), 28 hours (17 surveys), 30 hours (37 surveys) and 35 hours (31 surveys). These five weekly assignments together account for close to two-thirds of all Aboriginal EAs participating in the survey.

A review and comparison of average hours by school type yields some minor variance in paid assigned hours: Aboriginal EAs report higher than overall survey average hours at Middle and Secondary level schools and lower than average hours at the Elementary level. Variances for Alternate and Other schools were on average small.

All in all and despite the differences noted, Aboriginal EAs report a reality of part-time employment that is similar in broad outlines to what is found with the larger survey group. “Bell to bell” scheduling of paid employment appears as the norm with this sub-group as is the case with the larger EA population. What this means is that Aboriginal EAs report paid hours that vary only slightly on average with what was found for the larger survey population. For Aboriginal EAs, the average paid work week came to 26.2 hours while, for the overall survey population, the average was 26.0 hours. If the work of EAs having assignments of less than 20 hours per week is filtered out, the gap in assigned hours is wider but only by a small amount: Aboriginal EAs average 28.7 hours per week while the overall survey sample calculates out to 27.6 hours.

Aboriginal EAs also commented on their degree of satisfaction with current allocations of paid hours. In this connection, the pattern of survey results bears strong similarity to that found with the overall EA population and summarized in the 2008 *Respect & Recognition* report.

Chart 12: Expectations of work hours

Expectations of hours of work	% of Aboriginal EA responses	% of total survey respondents	% Variance	<i>Close to two-thirds of EAs want more paid hours and... Aboriginal EA responses are broadly similar to those of the overall EA population</i>
“I am content with the current allocation of paid hours for my position.”	36.9%	35.0%	1.9%	
“I would like to get more paid hours for my current position than are now allocated.”	51.0%	55.6%	-4.6%	
“I intend to bid into other EA positions that come available in order to increase my allocation of paid hours.”	12.1%	9.4%	2.7%	
N = 198				

Overall, somewhat more than a third of participants indicated satisfaction with currently largely part-time work status, while close to two-thirds said they would like to see paid hours increased.

Education assistants were also asked in the survey about time spent travelling from one work site to another. It was in this area that significant differences emerge between Aboriginal EAs and the larger survey group. Aboriginal EAs were three times as likely to log hours travelling from one site to another in the routine course of their work: almost one-third of Aboriginal EAs reported such travel time as compared with about 11.5 per cent of EAs overall. The following table shows the nature of these variances in greater detail for EAs who travel on the job.

Chart 13: Travel time on the job

How much time do you spend time traveling from one work site to another in a regular week?	Aboriginal EA responses (% of those reporting on-job travel time)	All survey responses (% of those reporting on-job travel time)	<i>Almost three times as many Aboriginal EAs report travel time related to their jobs</i>
Up to 2 hours per week	78.0%	77.4%	
Greater than 2 and up to 4 hours per week	10.2%	13.6%	
Greater than 4 and up to 6 hours per week	8.5%	5.9%	
Greater than 6 hours per week	3.4%	3.1%	
N =	69 (32.7% of Aboriginal EAs)	389 (11.5% of EAs)	

A majority of Aboriginal EAs who said they travelled as part of their work reported that their school district employers did provide remuneration – in whole or in part – for time spent travelling. At the same, 41.5 per cent of those who travelled said that remuneration was not forthcoming.

Of the EAs who reported travelling, those working in a total of 38 districts responded to the question asking whether they received remuneration. In 28 of these districts EAs said they were remunerated while in 25 districts, EAs responded that they were not. This means that in 15 districts, there was inconsistent practice on the part of the employers as regards payment for travel time. EAs working in districts reflecting this inconsistency accounted for almost two-thirds of those who report time spent traveling on the job.

Clearly, the issue of significant travel time emerges as a distinctive characteristic of Aboriginal EA work. In the focus group of Aboriginal EAs convened to discuss aspects of their work, participants talked about the need to travel to meet parents, family and community members in the routine course of their work.

Chart 14: Aboriginal focus group comments on subject of travelling time

I have to pick up students from residences. I have to pick up students from home and from work sometimes. The majority of this work means going to family homes where I have to liaise with families and parents. I also have to bring students to appointments with doctors and to other services in the community.

I do a lot of traveling between schools. We have lots of kids in care. I am also sometimes involved in connection with child protection services. Sometimes parents cannot deal with the demands placed on them to support their children within schools and the community. Sometimes they feel intimidated. I am generally not paid for doing this kind of work but it is very important for meeting the needs of the child.

We do not transport students in our own vehicles and more. I also no longer take children to appointments. Our new principal is heavily focused on academics. The principal's view is that doing this kind of transportation is the responsibility of the parents. This approach has not worked very well. The Child Care Workers in my district... often have a lot of frustrated people on their hands.

With some school district employers failing to provide proper or consistent remuneration for traveling time, this issue emerges as one of great priority for locals unions to address in the future.

E. Unpaid hours

First Nations' EAs also reported substantial experience with the performance of unpaid work on the job. The following chart shows that four out of five Aboriginal EAs report performing unpaid work, a similarly-sized group as found with the larger survey population.

Chart 15: Working unpaid hours

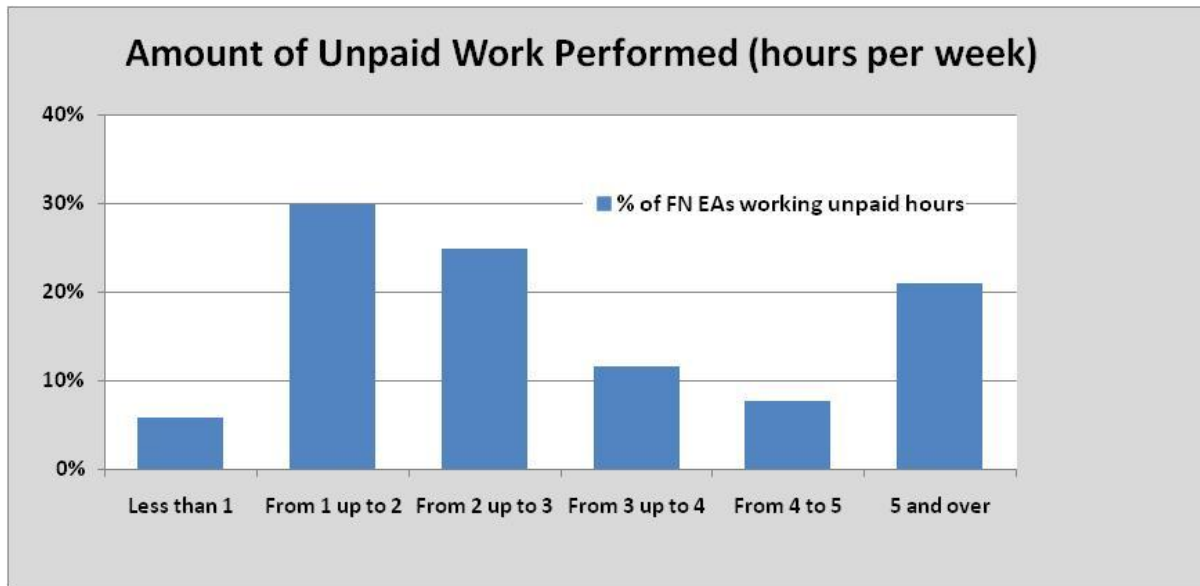
Do you work unpaid hours?	Aboriginal EAs	% Total	% Total for all survey responses
Yes	171	81.0%	81.7%
No	40	19.0%	18.3%
N = 211			

Almost identical percentages of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal EAs report unpaid hours on the job. In each case, it is a sizeable majority – more than four out of every five workers.

Clearly, unpaid work is the norm for how EA work is organized and carried out by Aboriginal members across the province. There was very little difference in patterns of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal EA participation in unpaid work in relation to the age of the EA. While there was a tendency for Aboriginal EAs with less work experience (under six years) to be less inclined to perform unpaid work, as compared with their more experienced counterparts, it must be cautioned that the sample sizes are relatively small for these sub-entities making comparisons at this level of detail less reliable.

How many hours of unpaid work are being performed? The following chart shows the breakdown for those who do report working unpaid hours on the job, by amount of work performed.

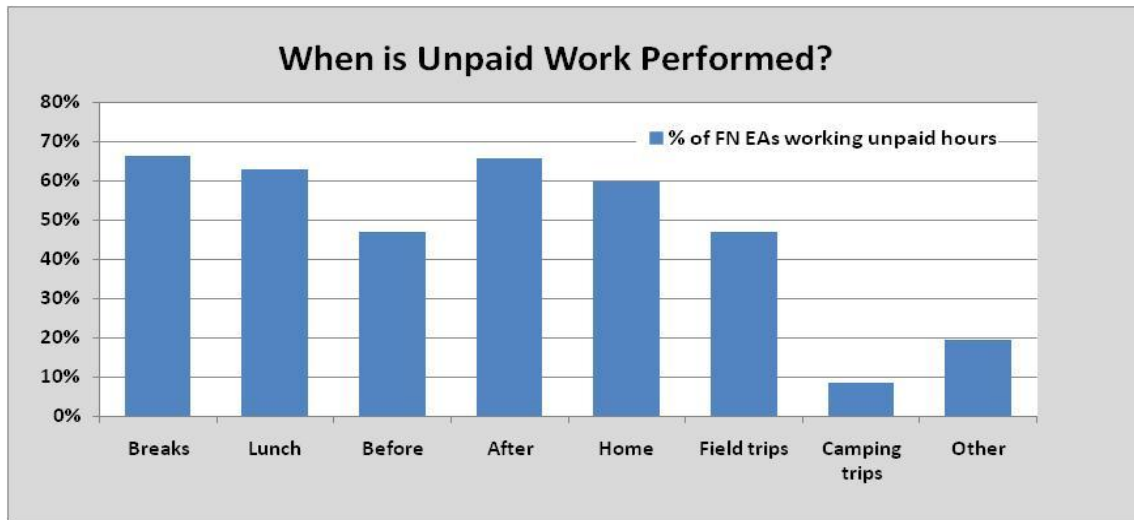
Chart 16: How much unpaid time?



For EAs reporting unpaid work time, the average amount reported was 2.8 hours per week. When this amount is calculated across the total number of EAs answering the question (including those saying they did not provide unpaid time), the average amount worked comes to 2.1 hours per week. At this level, Aboriginal EAs provide unpaid work time at roughly the same rate and to the same extent as what was reported with the larger survey population.

Aboriginal survey respondents also reported working unpaid hours at various point in the work day. In this, the pattern of their responses is not dissimilar from that of the larger survey population.

Chart 17: When is unpaid work performed?



As can be seen, “breaks”, “lunch time”, “after classes” and “at home” emerge as the most favoured points in the day for the performance of unpaid work. In addition, a majority of Aboriginal EAs reporting unpaid work report doing so at numerous times during the day with the largest group working at three and four points in an average work day. Clearly, unpaid work is a phenomenon occurring at all points before, during and after the paid work day when pressures to use this time emerge and opportunity permits. And most Aboriginal EAs commit themselves to unpaid work at multiple points throughout the work day.

What kind of work is performed during these periods? The following table shows the pattern of Aboriginal EA responses.

Chart 18: Activities comprising unpaid work time

What unpaid work is performed?	Aboriginal EAs	% of those doing unpaid work
Prepare materials for my assignment	117	51.5%
Consult with teachers or administrators or others	118	52.0%
Provide coverage of child outside assigned hours because:	76	33.5%
another staff member not reporting on time	83	36.6%
of transportation scheduling	74	32.6%
a parent is late picking up child	61	26.9%
of a lack of coverage and unfilled absences	44	19.4%
of problematic behaviour of students at the end of the day or during breaks	18	7.9%
Attend IEP meetings	40	17.6%
Provide coverage for drills or assemblies	30	13.2%
Provide coverage for field trips during school hours	35	15.4%
Accompany students during work experience or community-based activities	21	9.3%
N = 171		

Preparation, consultation and student coverage emerge as the most important activities occupying Aboriginal EAs during their unpaid work hours.

With this pattern, Aboriginal EAs use of unpaid time is very similar to that found with the overall EA population

Aboriginal EAs report involvement in a range of activities during the time they donate unpaid work to their employers. Top of the list are the activities of preparing materials, engaging in consultations with others about work and providing impromptu coverage outside assigned hours, for a host of different reasons relating primarily to scheduling, absences and student behavioural challenges. The fact that Aboriginal EAs chose voluntarily to engage in these activities without remuneration underlines both the existence of serious and recurring work challenges not properly planned for or dealt with by school authorities, as well as EAs' commitment to making their jobs and workplaces function in the best interests of students, despite these shortcomings.

Aboriginal EAs gave varied reasons for performing unpaid extra work. The following table shows a ranking of reasons in descending order of importance.

Chart 19: Main reasons for unpaid work

Rank	Reason	% of EAs citing this reason
1	I feel obliged to meet my students' needs	62.6%
2	I feel obliged to guarantee my students' safety	40.1%
3	My day's routine improves when I work these hours	39.2%
4	I feel obliged to cover emergency situations with my students	36.6%
5	I have a professional commitment to my job and work	33.9%
6	There is not enough time in my regular work schedule to do my job	32.2%
7	Other reasons	18.5%
8	Administrators expect me to work extra voluntary and unpaid hours	15.4%
8	The schedule does not allow for coverage for break times	15.4%
10	Teachers expect me to work extra voluntary and unpaid hours	11.9%
11	Parents expect me to work extra voluntary and unpaid hours	11.0%
12	Co-workers (other EAs or support staff) expect me to work extra voluntary and unpaid hours	8.4%
N = 187		

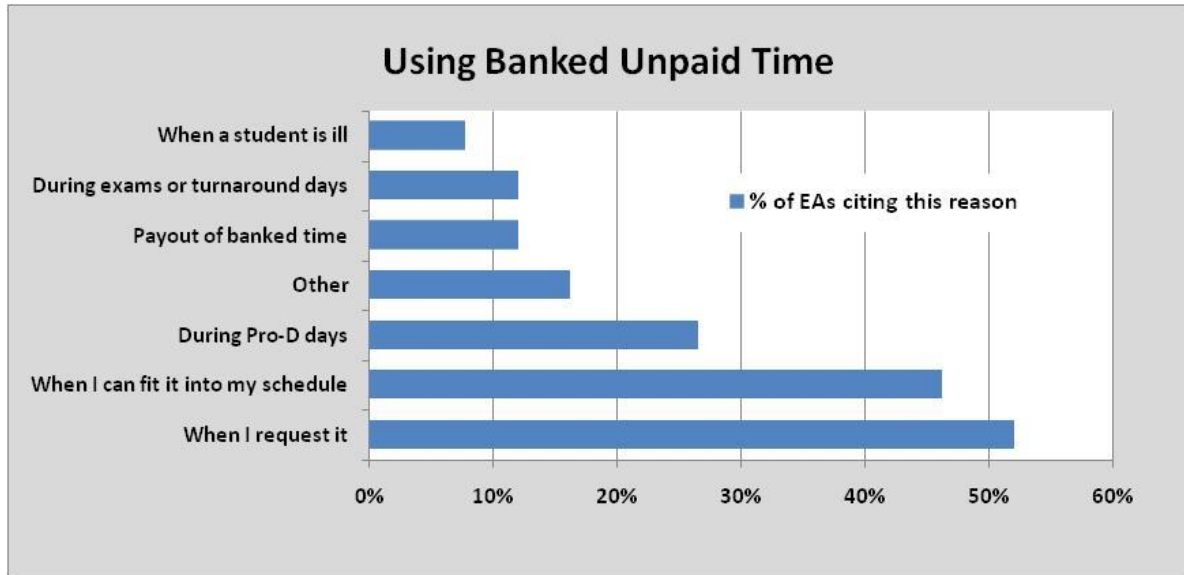
Aboriginal EAs cite professional reasons – a commitment to student needs or safety – for involving themselves in voluntary unpaid work

As can be seen, the top reasons cited involved a commitment to meeting student needs and to ensuring student safety. However, other reasons including the coverage of emergency situations and putting in time to ensure a better work routine also emerge as clear priority reasons. What is evident here once again is a clear commitment to student needs and interests. At the same time, there is a discernible element of pragmatism and informal problem-solving at play as Aboriginal EAs struggle to find workable arrangements capable of supporting them in their jobs.

F. Record-keeping of unpaid work

The survey also posed questions regarding the degree to which Aboriginal EA's supervisors – primarily school-based principals or vice-principals – know about the performance of voluntary unpaid work. About 79 per cent of EAs answering this question said that their supervisors knew about the practice while the remaining 21 per cent said that supervisors were not aware. At the same time, slightly over half of Aboriginal EAs said that some kind of arrangement have been established to govern how they bank unpaid time as well as how they draw upon and use this time. Specifics of the arrangements currently in place are summarized in the chart below.

Chart 20: Drawing on and using banked unpaid time



Aboriginal EAs indicate a high degree of flexibility and accommodation in the arrangements they create to use banked unpaid time. As is clear, Aboriginal EAs use a host of available means and opportunities to recoup banked time from their employers. This being said, only about 38 per cent of EAs indicated they used all of their banked time. For those that did not use up all banked time, the average amount used came to about 39 per cent of all time reported backed. What this means is that Aboriginal EAs fail to claim or use over 60 per cent of all the hours they accumulate as unpaid work. With this pattern of responses, Aboriginal EAs efforts to deal with the issue of storing and using unpaid time does not depart significantly from that found with the larger EA population.

In analyzing the phenomenon of relinquished unpaid time, the 2008 *Recognition & Respect* report drew attention to the implicit financial subsidy this time provides the public school system. In the case of the 76 Aboriginal EAs who reported not claiming all banked unpaid hours, the total level of weekly subsidy comes to approximately 130 hours. Annually, for this group, the amount of the implied subsidy would come to 5,200 hours.

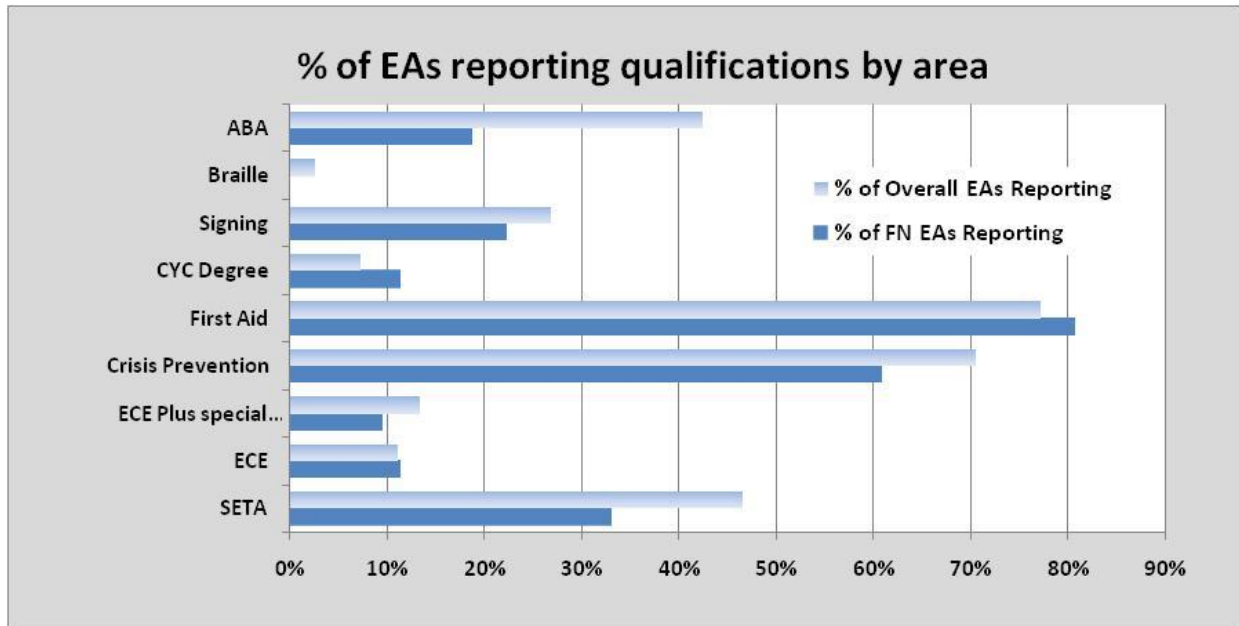
If the pattern of time banking and use reflected in these figures is representative of the larger Aboriginal EA population in the province, the overall amount of the time subsidy would calculate out to about 13,000 hours per year. At a nominal estimated rate of \$25 per hour, the annual dollar value of the implied subsidy from all Aboriginal EAs comes to about \$325,000.

G. Education and training issues

Aboriginal EAs provided valuable information about levels of formal training and certification. A total of 166 EAs or 73 per cent of the Aboriginal EA population participating in the survey provided information

about their educational backgrounds. The following table summarizes patterns of response while also comparing these patterns with those of the large EA survey population.

Chart 21: Comparison of Aboriginal EAs and overall survey qualifications



In general, Aboriginal EAs display educational background and qualifications commensurate with those of the larger survey population. There are some differences though in the extent to which both groups report certain types of qualifications. Overall, almost half of EAs report Special Education Teaching Assistant-type (SETA) qualification while for Aboriginal EAs, the equivalent figure is about a third. The overall EA population is also more likely to have educational background in the areas of crisis prevention, signing and ABA.

On the other side, Aboriginal EAs report higher levels of background and training in the areas of First Aid, early childhood education (ECE) and Child and Youth Care (CYC). Both groups report substantial background in the areas of regular ECE. A total of 17.6 per cent of Aboriginal EAs have either basic ECE training or the enhanced version (which has an explicit focus on special education) while for the larger EA population, the equivalent figure is 18.8 per cent. These figures are of particular importance given the provincial government's stated intention of directing further resources to the expansion of programming for pre-kindergarten children within the school system.

Through the survey Aboriginal EAs also spoke about individual priorities for further upgrading, education and training. Of a total of 227 survey responses, about half offered further information in this area. Themes of particular interest to emerge from the responses include an interest in the following:

- First Nations-related training in areas such as culture, language, the impact of residential schools on families, and supporting families,
- Behaviour-related training in areas such as dealing with challenging behaviour, violence, and dealing with motivational issues,
- Conflict resolution, as it relates to students but also in the context of relationships with other staff,
- FASD and its impact on learning challenges facing students,
- Technology and computer training, and
- Upgrading to help students with academic subjects, and autism.

H. Aboriginal EAs talk about their work

When Aboriginal EAs talk about their work, they raise a host of concerns broadly similar to those found with the larger survey population. These concerns centre around overall issues of a lack of recognition and respect for the work they perform with students, and frustration with a system that denies adequate paid employment while relying on the unpaid contributions that Aboriginal EAs provide. These comments reflect a sense of frustration that the school system does not properly acknowledge the care, commitment and dedication that Aboriginal EAs routinely bring to their work. In this, Aboriginal EAs echo concerns that are pervasive throughout the larger EA population in BC.

At the same time, Aboriginal EAs drew attention to the specific quality and character of their work with aboriginal students. Some survey participants cited a lack of recognition for or acknowledgement of the distinctive character of this work. Others referenced frustration at reduced pay scales in relation to other EA colleagues. In the Aboriginal EA focus group conducted in April, 2011, some participants cited feelings of isolation working in a First Nations support capacity and the need to connect with other people doing similar work in the public school system.

The following set of quotations from the open-ended section of the online survey gives some sense of the sentiments that surfaced in connection with this overall theme.

Chart 22: Aboriginal EAs talk about the unique quality of their work

Quotations from First Nations EAs
I am an aboriginal support worker, my qualifications/expectations and duties/pay are not that of an EA.
I'm First Nations and my pay scale differs, yet my job with all students remains the same as my SSA colleagues.
SSAs get paid more an hour than we (First Nations Support Workers) do. I run numerous clubs: homework club, reading club, cultural enrichment club, Aboriginal feast protocol and a drumming club. Incorporating Aboriginal culture is part of my job description. I need more paid hours and a higher wage level.

Aboriginal Education Assistants & Unpaid Work

As a First Nations Support Worker I spend a lot of time on the phone with parents after a school day and in the evening as they will call me at home. I will meet with them in the grocery store and spend my time dealing with their concernson the weekend.

At times I am expected by two administrators(at different schools where I work) to stay for extra time and not be paid or accommodated in any way for the extra time. Working in the Aboriginal Education department, I am doing the work of an EA.

For Aboriginal support workers in our district, our role differs greatly from an EA position in that we have monthly reports, parent contacts via home visits or phone calls, quarterly meetings with our local First Nations supporting bands, monthly Aboriginal Support Workers meetings, provide cultural resources to our teachers, etc.

Aboriginal Support Workers are supposed to be the same as CEA's according to our Superintendent but CEA's do not provide support to teachers about cultural information or give demonstrations, or create projects for students or attend Aboriginal staff meetings.

Doing the Aboriginal Support position - this involves lots of time dealing with students outside of school due to: death in families, alcoholism/drug/sexual abuse, parents' abuse against each other, suicide preventions. I know that in my job, I'm on the job 24/7, even during the summer months.

I believe we do the work we do because we love it. Our students need us for the whole day. There are support positions that are six hour positions and I feel strongly that at risk students, such as First Nations students, should have support for the whole day.

Comments made during the Aboriginal EA focus group echo many of similar themes and concerns regarding the distinctive quality of Aboriginal EA work and the support in requires.

Chart 23: Aboriginal Focus Group discussion regarding what is required to support EA work

The other aboriginal EAs I have contact with are asking for more support in terms of being effective dealing with their students' academic needs. At the same time we do get regular workshops on topics like FASD and alcohol and drug issues and this is good because it is important to keep current.

I think it is very important when working with students to have someone who is First Nations in the job. They need to understand what students go through to get where they are and often it is a worker of First Nations background who understands that because of their own life.

We sometimes have a problem of not being able to find enough staff with the proper background and qualifications to do this kind of work. I think the problem here resides in the fact that the employer does not spend enough time and energy recruiting in the right places to find these people.

In my district we get paid 1 to 2 dollars less per hour and this is despite the fact we have to deal with the whole range of issues that are very serious. This can at times involve even going into court. We have to go above and beyond regular education assistants duties and that should be recognized. I say this not wanting to diminish the work done via education assistants and I do acknowledge the difficulties they face in their jobs as well.

I. Comment

What can be said about the work life and culture of Aboriginal EAs including their involvement in the practice of unpaid work? The following issues emerge from the Aboriginal EA survey data and a comparison of results with those of the larger survey population.

- Aboriginal EAs are somewhat younger than their non-aboriginal counterparts. A significantly higher percentage of Aboriginal EAs are under age 45 than is the case with the larger EA population.
- The work of Aboriginal EAs is nearly as female-dominated as that of the overall population. Both groups report in excess of 90 per cent of jobs staffed by women.
- Aboriginal EAs report less experience on the job than their non-aboriginal counterparts – almost a third have less than four years of experience.
- More Aboriginal EAs involved in the survey live and work in the northern and Vancouver Island regions, in areas where there are higher percentage concentrations of aboriginal people and students. Less than 20 per cent were from the Metropolitan Vancouver region.
- Aboriginal EAs are also much more likely to work in alternate and non-standard school programs than their non-aboriginal counterparts. Despite the fact that most Aboriginal EAs report working in a special education capacity, a higher percentage are also found in culturally-specific programs geared to Aboriginal student populations.
- Aboriginal EAs were less likely to have involvement in the development of Individual Education Programs, and some voice open hostility to the way IEPs are used with Aboriginal students in their care.
- Aboriginal EAs emphasize the distinctive character of the work they undertake with First Nations students, centring in large part on extensive outreach work into families and communities that is not a normal part of regular EA jobs. At the same time, Aboriginal EAs feel the system they work in does not provide adequate acknowledgement or recognition of this fact.
- Aboriginal EAs, like their non-aboriginal counterparts, report a norm of part-time employment.
- Almost a third of Aboriginal EAs report travel time related to work, a rate close to three times the overall survey average. And, more than 40 per cent of Aboriginal EAs who travel report not being compensated for this time. At minimum, this reflects significant inconsistency and disparity within and amongst school districts.
- The incidence of unpaid work for Aboriginal EAs is similar to that of the larger survey population with both groups reporting in excess of 80 per cent involved in the practice. The same applies to the volume of such work which for Aboriginal EAs came to an average of just over two hours per week. Aboriginal EAs, like the larger survey population, also report working unpaid hours at multiple points before, during and after the paid work day and say they use this time to prepare for their assignments, to do necessary consultation or to provide student coverage in a host of circumstances.

- Reasons for the performance of unpaid work relate largely to professional concern for the needs and welfare of students in the EAs care. Once again, Aboriginal EAs responses bear strong similarity to those provided by the larger survey population.
- Aboriginal EAs report the same nature and incidence of informal reporting and information-tracking systems as was described in the original *Recognition & Respect* report. Typically school-based administrators were either cited as participants in these arrangements or at minimum as having knowledge of them.
- Aboriginal EAs report broadly similar levels and areas of education background and qualification. They have similar interests in further education and training but also cite an interest in areas of training that relate specifically to the aboriginal focus of their work.
- Aboriginal EAs cite similar issues and concerns in regards to lack of recognition for the work they do, as is the case with the overall survey population. At the same time, they talk about issues that are distinctive to their work as Aboriginal EAs- their need to advocate on behalf of their students, their work bridging the divide that often separates the public school system from Aboriginal families and communities, and feelings of isolation that are sometimes encountered on the job.

J. Conclusions

By their survey responses, First Nations education assistants show themselves to share a broad range of concerns with the overall education assistant population regarding the work they perform. These concerns centre on the lack of respect, recognition and paid employment required to do the best job possible in meeting the needs of their students.

At the same time, Aboriginal EAs draw attention to significant differences in their work environment and to ways their employment realities differ from those of EAs of non-Aboriginal background. Aboriginal EAs work is engaged more closely with Aboriginal families and communities than is the norm with other EAs. This work can involve substantially more travel time much of which is non-remunerated. It can also entail liaison with a broader range of external services and agencies, within government as well as at the community level. And many Aboriginal EAs feel that their employment status and pay levels do not adequately acknowledge the distinctive qualities of the work they perform.

It is incumbent on both employers and support staff unions like CUPE (which alone represents 90 per cent of EAs and other support staff in BC) to work to address these issues in ways which acknowledge and support the valuable contribution EAs working with Aboriginal students make to our public K-12 system on a daily basis. CUPE workers are often consulted when school boards bring applications before the BC Human Rights Tribunal for permission to post Aboriginal Education Assistant positions as preferring or requiring an incumbent of Aboriginal ancestry. While protecting the collective agreement rights of its members, CUPE has consistently supported such applications, in recognition not only of

cultural sensitivity considerations but also the important role-modeling these applications make possible.

Attachment 1: Aboriginal EA participation rates & reported average unpaid time by school district

SD	Name	Survey participants	Average weekly unpaid hours
8	Kootenay Lake	1	2.0
20	Kootenay-Columbia	3	4.7
22	Vernon	3	1.3
23	Central Okanagan	6	4.1
28	Quesnel	5	2.5
33	Chilliwack	8	1.8
35	Langley	6	4.4
36	Surrey	12	1.9
37	Delta	2	3.0
38	Richmond	1	n.a.
39	Vancouver	3	3.3
40	New Westminster	4	4.3
41	Burnaby	1	1.0
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	6	3.3
43	Coquitlam	4	4.3
44	North Vancouver	7	3.6
46	Sunshine Coast	2	4.0
50	Haida Gwaii	2	1.0
51	Boundary	3	1.0
53	Okanagan-Similkameen	1	n.a.
54	Bulkley Valley	5	2.7
57	Prince George	20	2.7
58	Nicola-Similkameen	2	3.5
60	Peace River North	3	1.5
61	Greater Victoria	1	2.0
62	Sooke	7	2.4
63	Saanich	1	n.a.
67	Okanagan-Skaha	2	3.0
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	15	2.7
69	Qualicum	4	2.5
70	Alberni	1	2.0
71	Comox Valley	12	2.9
72	Campbell River	4	1.0
73	Kamloops/Thompson	7	3.0
74	Gold Trail	5	2.1
75	Mission	6	1.9
78	Fraser-Cascade	4	3.5
79	Cowichan Valley	2	n.a.
82	Coast Mountains	14	2.6
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	3	2.0
85	Vancouver Island North	2	1.3
87	Stikine	3	n.a.
91	Nechako Lakes	21	3.2
93	Conseil Scolaire Francophone	3	1.5

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